**Table of Contents**

1. **Introduction 3-4**
2. **Faulkner’s Self-representation in His Life and in His Novels 5-18**
   1. A Short Faulkner Biography 5-8
   2. William Faulkner and the Virginia University Interviews 8-13
   3. William Faulkner’s Self-representation and Performance 13-18
3. **Faulkner’s Yoknapatawpha County 18-29**
   1. A Comparison of Lafayette County and Yoknapatawpha County 19
      1. Lafayette County 19-21
      2. Yoknapatawpha County 21-23
      3. The Lowland South vs. The Upland South 24-26
   2. A Stereotype – the Yeoman Farmer and the Aristocrat 26-29
4. **Faulkner’s Civil War and Political Standpoint 29-43**
   1. Faulkner’s Understanding of Southern Identity in the Antebellum South 30-31
   2. Slavery and *Light in August* (2005) 31-34
   3. Southernism and *Absalom, Absalom* (2005) 34-36
   4. Paternalism and *Absalom, Absalom* (2005) 36-39
   5. Faulkner in Political Context 39-43
5. **Kierkegaard and Sartre 43-50**
   1. Søren Kierkegaard – The Despairing Self 43-47
   2. Jean-Paul Sartre – The Look and the Other 47-50
6. **Discriminatory Social Conditions in Faulkner’s Novels 50-87**
   1. Racism and the Other 50-69
      1. Racism in *Light in August* (2005)

– Joe Christmas 51-56

* + 1. Racism in *Absalom, Absalom* (2005)

– The Bon-Sutpen Family 56-61

* + 1. Classism in *As I Lay Dying* (2004)

– Anse Bundren 62-64

* + 1. Classism in *Flags in the Dust* (2012)

– The Snopeses and the MacCallums 64-69

* 1. Sexism and the Other 69-85
     1. Sexism and Classism in *As I Lay Dying* (2004)

– The Bundren Women 70-75

* + 1. Sexism in *Flags in the Dust* (2012)

– Aunt Jenny, Narcissa, and Belle 75-83

* + 1. Sexism in *Light in August* (2005)

– Joanna Burden 83-84

* + 1. Sexism in *Absalom, Absalom* (2005)

– Rosa Coldfield and Judith Sutpen 84-85

* 1. Review of Racism, Classism and Sexism in Faulkner’s Novels 85-87

1. **Discriminatory Social Conditions – Then and Now 87-93**
2. **Conclusion 93-95**
3. **Reference List 96-98**
4. **Introduction**

William Faulkner’s American South is rooted in the question of identity. More particularly, it is rooted in the question of southern identity and this in regards to the discriminatory social conditions of racism, classism and sexism. His fictional Yoknapatawpha County is a mirror of the American South as it is found in history, a microcosm of the South within the South. Through his novels, Faulkner highlights the discriminatory social conditions of the American South. He understood how discriminatory social conditions had been inherited from past generations to newer generations, conditions such as racism, classism and sexism. In an attempt to account for the injustice of these discriminatory social conditions that span all the way back to the antebellum era, Faulkner replicated them into Yoknapatawpha County with the wish that his novels would appeal to the people of the South and make them renounce the racism, classism and sexism inherited from their ancestors.

We can derive from this that what interested Faulkner in his authorship were the sins of the fathers as they took their shape in southern history. Faulkner saw in the American South a history of internalized bigotry regarding race, class and sex as a result of age-old social conditions stemming back to the antebellum era, such as slavery and paternalism. This internalized bigotry was passed on to newer generations in the form of an internalized guilt in the face of the changing humanitarian standards of the budding modern age. These sins of the fathers were what Faulkner believed that the South needed to process in order for the South to develop on par with the rest of the United States. With the sins of the fathers, we speak of the oppression of marginalized Others in southern society. Here, discriminatory social conditions have created a stark dichotomy. The female and the black populaces pose as marginalized and subversive Others to the authoritative white patriarchs. This is in part due to how slavery has created a culture in which any change to the female status is a potential threat to the social order, linking race and sex together as an Other to the white patriarch. This oppression of black people and women also meant that white males were Otherized, yet instead of being Otherized through marginalization, the Othering of the white male was grounded in his inability to be anything else than the opposition to the marginalized others, namely the oppressor of those.

 Faulkner saw that this dichotomy, the oppositional relationship between the people of the South, was hard-pressed to change as a result of the internalized guilt within southern society and how this guilt smothered any and all possibility for the dichotomy to change. This conundrum is what we will analyze in Faulkner’s works by donning the goggles of the existentialists Søren Kierkegaard and Jean-Paul Sartre.

From an existentialist perspective, identity is rooted in choice. Existentialism understands identity as a process, as something that changes and develops according to the choices you make in life. In the case of the Southerner, the individual is robbed of his choice. It is impossible for him to do anything else but reflect the dichotomy of the South and thus the internalized guilt of the South, regardless of whether it fits him as an individual or not. This is the predicament that the majority of Faulkner’s characters suffer under. It counts for blacks, women and white males as a whole. Faulkner’s characters are forced to fit into a pre-defined identity based on the dichotomy of the South. They are not allowed to create their own identity, and they suffer greatly under this. Thusly, we will examine how Faulkner has interpreted and exemplified Southern identity from the perspective of Kierkegaardian despair and Sartrean Otherness as seen through select characters of Yoknapatawpha County that struggle under the systematic oppression of racism, classism and sexism.

Modernist literature, the literary period that Faulkner belongs to, was abundant with existentialist thought. Even though existentialism was not coined a term until postmodernism, philosophers were developing the concept of existentialism at the same time as modernist literature flourished. The modernist theme of alienation is a particularly apt parallel to the existentialist concerns over the individual as struggling to create his identity. Modernist writers often portray characters as alienated from their communities or their families. This alienation prevents the individual from realizing its identity and thus comes to feel despair in the Kierkegaardian sense. Through his modernist theme of alienation, Faulkner has incorporated existentialist thought into his novels. It’s therefore relevant to analyze Faulkner’s interpretation of Southern identity from the perspective of existentialism. Additionally, Faulkner was part of the Lost Generation. This is the generation that came off age during World War I, and the link between modernism and existentialism may be explained through them. The Lost Generation was made up of modernist writers such as Hemingway, Fitzgerald, Elliot, Joyce and many more. These writers felt an acute despair and alienation in their own lives as a result of growing up during wartime, and this became a theme which they translated into their later literary works, thus shaping their modernist works into works of existentialist concern.

1. **Faulkner’s Self-representation in His Life and in His Novels**

Faulkner used his life experiences as creative fodder for his novels. It is essential to know what those life experiences are and how they affected Faulkner in order to be able to analyze his literature accordingly. And, just as it is important to know the facts of Faulkner’s life, it is likewise necessary to know his opinions on society and personal experiences. The interviews recorded at Virginia University between 1957 and 58 are an important source of information as they are Faulkner’s own thoughts and opinions coming directly from him. Contrarily, information provided by authors should always be treated with skepticism. Authors are artists first and foremost, and they are in the field of acting out an image to fit their work. In regards to Faulkner, he greatly valued his privacy. Therefore, it should be assumed that all statements made by Faulkner on important topics are calculated to project a specific image of him as an artist. They are all part of his self-representation and must be viewed critically.

The first part of this section will outline important events in Faulkner’s life, his writing career and the people who affected him personally. The second part will discuss the statements Faulkner himself put forward in class interviews at Virginia University when he was a Writer-in-Residence. The third and last part will discuss the self-representations that Faulkner created through his writing, interviews, and letters, and how these representations are also present in his novels.

* 1. **A Short Faulkner Biography**

William Faulkner used his own life as material for his novels. This includes important events and people that he knew. As such, it is conductive to our later analysis to first give an account of Faulkner’s life and the people who influenced it.

William Cuthbert Faulkner was born September 25th, 1897 in New Albany, Mississippi. He was the eldest of four boys born to Murry Cuthbert Falkner and Maud Butler Falkner. In 1902 the family moved to Oxford, Mississippi. William became attached to Oxford and throughout his life he often returned to the town, eventually buying a house there, Rowan Oak.

When Faulkner was seventeen, he met Philip Stone who supported Faulkner’s dream to become an author. Faulkner expanded his knowledge of literature through Stone, and it was at this time he became acquainted with modernist writers such as Conrad Aiken, Sherwood Anderson, and James Joyce by whom he would be greatly influenced.

At the end of World War I, William Faulkner tried to enlist as a pilot in the American military, but he was rejected as he was too short. Instead Faulkner passed himself off as British and enlisted in the Royal Air Force in Canada. The war ended before Faulkner finished his training and he never actively participated in the war.

In 1929, the Great Depression hit America. Incidentally it was also the year that Faulkner married Estelle Oldham Franklin. Estelle and Faulkner dated when they were young, but Estelle’s parents did not think that Faulkner was a suitable match, and instead they pushed her to marry another man. However, Faulkner and Estelle kept in touch, and when her first marriage fell apart, they got married afterwards. Unfortunately, the marriage was not free of significant complications as both Faulkner and Estelle had become heavy drinkers, a habit which sent Faulkner to the hospital on several occasions and would later take his life in 1962. However, alcohol was not the only problem in their marriage. In 1931, Estelle gave birth to the Faulkners’ first daughter, Alabama. Unfortunately, she was born prematurely and only lived for nine days. Faulkner has stated that the character Caddy from *The Sound and the Fury* (1995)is based on the sister he never had and the daughter he lost (Faulkner, 1933, 252). In 1933, their second daughter Jill was born. Faulkner and Estelle grew closer for a short while after the birth of their daughters, but soon the marriage would be in trouble again. As the family had grown with Jill and Estelle’s two children from her previous marriage, Faulkner began seeking work outside Oxford to support the family. As a result, Faulkner was away from home a lot and initiated long-lasting affairs with several women. The troubled marriage, Estelle, their daughters, step-children, and extra-marital affairs would all become significant themes in Faulkner’s literary works.

Many other people and relationships would also inspire Faulkner. Of significant importance to Faulkner’s upbringing are his parents, his black nanny, and his great-grandfather. Faulkner’s relationship with his parents was as complicated as all other relationships in his life. Murry was an absent father, and as a result Faulkner grew closer with his mother. The themes of the distant father and the superficial relationship between father and son are themes which Faulkner uses frequently in his novels, for example the relationship between Quentin Compson and his father in *The Sound and the Fury* (1995) and *Absalom, Absalom* (2005).

Where Faulkner’s father was distant, Faulkner’s mother on the other hand was a strong pillar in his life. His mother was a strong-willed Southern woman, whom he frequently corresponded with when he travelled. The older, strong-willed mother is also frequently portrayed in Faulkner’s works. Of note can be mentioned Aunt Jenny in *Flags in the Dust* (2012), Rosa Coldfield in *Absalom, Absalom* (2005)and Mrs. Compson in *Sound and the Fury* (1995). Even though these female characters are portrayed as strong and independent, they also have at least one major flaw. Aunt Jenny is the matriarch of the family, but she is stuck in the past and cannot see how naming Narcissa’s baby Benbow will change his future and break the family curse. Rosa Coldfield lives an independent life alone, but she has a problem with men and relationships. She almost marries Thomas Sutpen, but refuses him when he suggests they have a child out of wedlock. She is, likewise, in love with Charles Bon despite never having met him. Mrs. Compson is strong-willed with her family, but she is overprotective of her children, and portrays herself as weak by claiming to be consistently sick. As stated, these women share the characteristic of being strong-willed and decisive women, but they also share the characteristic of having at least one considerable flaw which significantly impacts their lives and the lives of those around them.

Another strong influence in Faulkner’s life was his black nanny Caroline Barr, or Mammy Callie. It is argued that Faulkner’s headstrong black women are partly based on Mammy Callie. This is the case with Dilsey in *The Sound and the Fury* (1995). Furthermore, through Mammy Callie, who was a former slave, Faulkner learned about slavery and the heavy legacy it left behind. It would not be much of a stretch to claim that Faulkner must have felt the guilt of the old South caused by slavery when you consider one of his closest maternal relationships to be with a black woman who had lived through slavery and had several children taken from her to be sold.

The last significant influence in Faulkner’s life and authorship was his great-grandfather Colonel William Cuthbert Falkner whom William Faulkner was named after. Colonel Falkner gained his title of Colonel during the Civil War when he recruited his own regiment to go to war. Colonel Faulkner did not achieve great glory through the Civil War. Instead his great renown came after the Civil War when he built his own railroad from Ripley in Mississippi to Tennessee. The theme of Civil War legends is familiar to Faulkner’s readers as he has used the theme in *Absalom, Absalom* (2005), *Light in August* (2005)and *Flags in the Dust* (2012). In *Absalom, Absalom,* Faulkner portrays the Sutpen family’s exploits during the Civil War, and in *Light in August* it is Hightower and Mrs. Burden’s family legends that are described. In *Flags in the Dust*, the family legend is Colonel John Sartoris who also built the local railroad. Faulkner has thus been able to draw on his own life and the people in his life to portray his version of the South in the form of Yoknapatawpha County.

* 1. **William Faulkner and the Virginia University Interviews**

To find information directly from an author about their lives and their opinions is uncommon. To find that information in the form of interviews covering everything from their writing and novels to their personal opinions about politics and society is of great value to anyone who wishes to analyze that author’s works.

From February until June 1957 and again from February until June in 1958, Faulkner was a Writer-in-Residence at the University of Virginia. Part of his duties as Writer-in-Residence was to answer questions from students during scheduled sessions. Most of these sessions were recorded and are now available at the University of Virginia’s website: http://faulkner.lib.virginia.edu/

In his interviews at the University of Virginia, he gives his opinions on slavery, segregation, and the importance of black people in the South and in American society. He also gives his own thoughts on his novels and other works. Here, a small amount of context might be beneficent since Virginia, at the time of Faulkner’s residence, was in turmoil over the court-ordered integration of black and white people in schools and other public institutions. Virginia promoted the implicitly discriminatory Jim Crow laws of segregation. This meant that the court-ordered integration lead to resistance such as closing a number of public schools so that integration could not take place. Keeping this in mind, it becomes obvious that some of Faulkner’s answers to questions regarding black people and integration would have been seen at quite controversial at the time and place.

When asked about the curse of the South, Faulkner calls slavery the curse of the South. At the same time he is asked about which place in society black people possess, and whether Faulkner believes this position will change. Faulkner states that he believes black people want equality, but once equality has been achieved, black people will still wish to stay with their own people. In other words, Faulkner believed that once equality had been achieved and black people had the same rights as white people, then black people would not want to integrate with white people but instead stay within their own communities (Blotner, 4/13/57).

Furthermore, he believes there to be a difference between how southerners and northerners perceives the black populace. Southerners prefer blacks as individuals but not in a mass, whereas northerners prefer black people in a mass but not as individuals. As such, Faulkner is stating that the South fears the power of many black people working together in unity, but that the individual black person is accepted as a part of the South and southern life and thus not feared. The southerner’s fear is an economic fear, given that black people have learned through force and necessity to live with less than what white people have. Yet if black people are made equal to white people, then they also have the right to the same things as white people and this will remove the prestige and elitism that comes with being of the white populace (General Public, 5/15/57)

Faulkner goes on to say of the past of the South: “It may be that—that all of us curse the day when the first slave was sold into this country, but that's too late now. And to live in—in this country, anywhere in the world today, and to—to—to be against giving a man what equality—cultural, educational, economic—that he's capable and responsible for, is like living in Alaska and being against snow. You've got snow. It's—it's foolish to be against it. You've got it” (Ribble, 02/20/58). Faulkner says here that it is time for the South to stop looking into the past and start to move forward in order to solve the problem that was created through slavery. Faulkner’s ideas of racism and the treatment of black people in the South might be argued to stem from his early experience with a black mother figure through Mammy Callie.

Many of Faulkner’s characters have also been the result of relationships between black and white people. *In Absalom, Absalom (*2005), Thomas Sutpen suspects his first wife of being black which causes him to leave her and their son Charles Bon. *In Light in August* (2005), Joe Christmas believes that he is part Negro and develops an identity crisis as a result.

When asked directly about his views on miscegenation, Faulkner explains that he does not perceive it as wrong, but that in the society at the time it is considered a mistake and that this point of view is the cause of much pain and tragedy (Blotner, 4/13/57).

Faulkner extends this view from black people to Native Americans when he was asked about Chickasaw Indians. He explains that the information he worked from to portray Chickasaw Indians in his texts was not as much from actual research but more “from listening to people and adding a little imagination to it” (Gwynn, 5/2/58). Faulkner adds that the Native Americans he knows, who are descendants of the Chickasaw Indians, have also engaged in miscegenation both with white and black people and still live in Mississippi. Faulkner comments on the miscegenation of the Chickasaws that “I don't think that—that people are all that different no matter what color they are. That people are different more because of the pressure of their environment than because of their blood” (Gwynn, 5/2/58). This comment might have been seen as controversial in Virginia and would have challenged the students’ perception of race and miscegenation.

In the interviews, Faulkner also gives his insight on writing. Faulkner retells the story of how his writing career began when he met Sherwood Anderson. Anderson was a writer himself. Faulkner liked the look of a writer’s life that he experienced through Anderson and decided to write a novel himself. He found he enjoyed it and when questioned by Anderson’s wife as to why they never saw him anymore, he told her that he was writing a novel. Anderson responded by stating that as long as he never had to read the novel, he would get his publisher to accept it. Faulkner had his first novel published and was caught by the writing bug (Coleman, 2/25/57).

When it comes to the literary proliferation of the South, Faulkner answers:

“Probably because the South has the leisure which is the dream of any artist. I think that the—the best thing a nation can do if it really wants peace to devote itself to things of the mind and human spirit is to pick out a good, rich nation, declare war on them and let them—and let themselves get whipped. I think after the North whipped us we had nothing to do but—but to write, paint, so we became writers. The rest of the country was too busy supporting us” (MacAleer, 5/1/58).

Here, Faulkner stresses that the motive of writing should be the mind and human spirit. According to Faulkner, the writer is demon-driven, meaning that the writer tries to create a better version of the world he sees around him. This is what Faulkner himself has tried to do through his themes of racism, classism and sexism, the discriminatory social conditions that he sees as unfair and wishes to address in his novels in order to create a better version of the world around him. This does not mean that the writer should try to create a peaceful world where nothing bad happens, but rather that the writer wants to create a world where the heroes are better heroes than in real life and the villains are better villains than in real life. This is, however, what drives the writer on, because the writer is never satisfied and is therefore driven to write another novel, believing that this time they will write a novel which fulfills the dream (MacAleer, 5/1/58).

Faulkner believes that when writing a novel, the writer uses observation, experience and imagination. Although you write from what you know, such as people you have met and places you have been, it is also impossible to write a character and base that character completely on one specific person. This is where imagination comes into play. Furthermore the writer wants to improve on what he sees around him. Faulkner explains that this is also what he does when he is telling the world a story from the South. He is not trying to satirize the South, nor is he necessarily expressing his own ideas in his novels. Instead he is:

“telling about people, and these people express ideas which—which sometimes are mine, sometimes are not mine, but I myself am not trying to satirize my country. I love it, and it has its faults, and I will try to correct them, but I wouldn't try to—to correct them when I'm writing a story, because I'm telling—talking about people then” (Gwynn, 4/15/57).

This plays into the notion that Faulkner did not try to represent a stereotype of the South, but that he wanted to tell a story the way that he saw it and had experienced it.

When asked about his ultimate goal as a writer, Faulkner says that the ultimate goal probably isn’t success. Instead it is to leave something behind to be remembered by: “(…) the writer doesn't want success, that he knows he has a short span of life, that the day will come when he must pass through the wall of oblivion, and he wants to leave a scratch on that wall, "Kilroy was here," that somebody a hundred or a thousand years later will see” (MacAleer, 3/13/58). This comment relates to the idea that Faulkner did not put forth the “real” Faulkner, but instead created personas for different occasions all based on his self-representation. Faulkner wanted to be the one to decide how he was remembered and what kind of legacy he would leave behind.

During these interviews, Faulkner is questioned about inheritance and he makes an acute observation which both Søren Kierkegaard and Jean-Paul Sartre would agree with: “I think what I intend to say is man's immediate behavior is the result of the pressure of his environment. The—the method in which he behaves, of course, is—is heredity” (Gwynn, 5/2/58). He goes on to expand on the subject:

“I think that heredity, if the word means anything, must be a constant factor. That would not change. It would alter. It would evolve. Man's behavior, which at one moment is this and in—under another situation is that, is because of the pressure of the immediate environment. But regardless of his—his blood, his heritage, circumstance will compel him to—to make choices. He will make the choice according to the pressure of the environment” (Gwynn, 5/2/58).

Here Faulkner, perhaps unknowingly, echoes Sartre’s theory of free choice. Faulkner explains that by environment he means “the immediate conditions of a moment” which a person is part of and which is constantly changing. By heredity he means that it is a constant never-changing factor which is created from the environment, or immediate conditions, as they in time become a constant. In the immediate moment we are forced to act according to the surrounding environment and how we act, or react, is the result of our cultural inheritance. To put it simply, according to Kierkegaard an individual must develop their self through life experiences. Sartre adds to Kierkegaard’s theory by stating that the self is developed through choices, but choices can be restricted by a person’s facticity such as their race or gender, including the culture that they are born into. Therefore Faulkner is agreeing with Kierkegaard and Sartre in that one’s identity is not something that you are born with, but instead something that you need to develop. Faulkner also agrees that being Otherized will restrict your choices, which we will elaborate on in a later section. Faulkner is therefore saying that the surrounding environment forces a person to make choices, but that these choices are restricted based on your cultural Otherness and your heredity, such as being black or a woman in a society ruled by white men. Faulkner’s black characters and female characters are all examples of this theory as they are restricted by their heredity which is grounded in their Otherness.

Since Faulkner led a fairly private life, these interviews are a valuable source of information on Faulkner’s own opinions on the state of the South and his own writing. However, it is also evident from these interviews that Faulkner had put a lot of thought into his answers and as such he was creating a deliberate image of the artist and the man that he wanted to be remembered as in the future.

* 1. **William Faulkner’s Self-representation and Performance**

Much seems to be known about William Faulkner if you take the multitude of biographies into account. However, it would be wise to take these facts with a grain of salt and remain critical. Therefore, an account of how and why Faulkner created images to present himself in certain ways and which images he created are essential to understand Faulkner’s life and his novels. James G. Watson has in his book *William Faulkner: Self-representation and Performance* (2000) analyzed the manner in which Faulkner has created the image of the Southern writer and exactly which image he aimed to create. It is also important to note that even though Faulkner created images of himself through his self-representations, it is necessary to presuppose that Faulkner’s declamations, both with regards to himself and in his works, carry some truth and are not all a pretense. If they were all pretense, there would be no basis to with which to analyze his novels from. Yet, pretense or not, a critical approach is still alpha omega.

To start at the beginning, Watson explains the difference between self-representation and performance. Self-representation is the knowledge created by personal experience which the author uses to create his stories. Performance is the act of writing down the story itself with those self-representations in mind (5).

In Faulkner’s case, he has said that when he wrote his novels, he saw himself as God creating people and places and moving the people around as he pleased. In fact, he thought that he “improved on God, who, dramatic though he may be, has no sense, no feeling for theatre” (134). Faulkner wrote from his own experiences, but like most authors he changed those experiences into something that he thought was more dramatic and more interesting to read. Just as Faulkner adjusted his writing to be more interesting, he also adjusted his own personal image as such. An apparent example of how Faulkner presented himself as something he was not is through his enlistment during WWI. As already explained, Faulkner played the role of a British soldier in order to enlist in Canada. He did this by assuming a British accent and changing his last name from Falkner to Faulkner adding a “u”. However, the performance does not end with passing himself off as a British soldier. Even though Faulkner never saw combat, he affected a limp when he returned to Oxford after the war, evoking an image of a war-weary veteran soldier returning home. This might also cast some light on why Faulkner tried so hard to become a soldier in the first place. Faulkner could easily have used the excuse that he had been rejected by the American military to avoid being drafted. Instead he travelled to Canada and assumed a different persona to be enlisted. The image of the war-weary veteran was a strong image in the South, and Faulkner might have been attempting to fit in amongst his fellow southerners. To add to this claim, the legacy of Faulkner’s great-grandfather, Colonel Falkner, should be remembered. Colonel Falkner was remembered and revered in Faulkner’s family long after he had died. Faulkner himself sought to be remembered in a positive light, and he might have seen WWI as an opportunity to take his place among the southern war veterans like his great-grandfather.

WWI was not the only time Faulkner assumed a personality that can be argued not to be the true Faulkner. After WWI, while he was studying at University of Mississippi, Faulkner received the nickname “Count No ‘Count”. This was due to the way he dressed and the manner of his behavior. Faulkner continued to play a role, but this time the role was not a British soldier. Instead it was that of a dandy, poet student (21). Faulkner was admitted into the university through his father’s job without having finished high school which set him apart from the regular students. Faulkner might have wished to create the image of dandy poet to fit in amongst his fellow students, yet still wanted to be remembered as someone to be revered.

Faulkner’s self-representations extended to letters that he wrote to his parents, friends, and editors throughout his life. This is particularly visible in his communication with his father. The majority of his letters to his parents were addressed to his mother. However, through the letters he writes to his father, Faulkner seems to be creating a closer relationship than what was actually the case between the father and son. Simply the fact that Faulkner wrote his father when they were not close implies a performance of a sort. Faulkner could have settled for making mentions to his father in the letters that he wrote to his mother, but instead he wrote letters addressed to his father and even made personal disclosures such as admitting to being homesick (65). Watson aptly describes the roles that Faulkner creates for himself and his father through these letters: “The Murry of those letters, essentially, is the dependable, *written* father Faulkner needed if he were to be the dutiful and appreciative son he wished to imagine himself” (64).

The dysfunctional father-son relationship is mirrored in Faulkner’s works. The relationship between Quentin and Mr. Compson in *The Sound and the Fury* (1995) and *Absalom, Absalom* (2005) has already been mentioned, but can here be elaborated upon. If we look at the letter writing, Mr. Compson writes several letters to Quentin, however Quentin never answers the letters. Nevertheless, previous conversations between Quentin and Mr. Compson are continually on Quentin’s mind. Where Faulkner created a relationship between himself and his father through his letters, Quentin creates a relationship between himself and Mr. Compson in his mind. Similarly, the relationships between Anse Bundren and his sons in *As I Lay Dying* (2004) are equally dysfunctional. As an example, we can mention the incident where the eldest son, Cash, breaks his leg. When the family reaches the nearest town, Mottson, they are questioned by a marshal who tells Anse that they should take Cash to the doctor. Anse refuses and instead they buy cement and pour it on Cash’s broken leg. When the family finally arrives in Jefferson, they take Cash to Doc Peabody. His reaction upon seeing Cash’s broken leg encased in cement is to curse Anse: ““You mean, it never bothered Anse much,” I said. “No more than it bothered him to throw that poor devil down in the public street and handcuff him like a damn murderer.”” (Faulkner, 2004, 117). The “poor devil” Peabody mentions is another of Anse’s sons, Darl, who was just arrested for setting fire to a barn and will be taken to a sanatorium. Instead of being with Cash as he is being treated by Peabody and or say goodbye to Darl as he is taken away, Anse is out finding a new wife. These examples of flawed father-son relationships are symptomatic of Faulkner’s works. Readers will be hard pressed to find an example of a functional father-son relationship in any of Faulkner’s major literary works.

Since Faulkner’s father was distant through Faulkner’s childhood, Faulkner was raised by his mother and Mammy Callie. Being raised mainly by women is also reflected in Faulkner’s writing. Faulkner uses schemas when writing both his female and male characters. For his female characters he uses a schema where women are frequently portrayed as strong but with a major flaw. Faulkner’s male characters are also all written from a schema where they are flawed. The difference between the schema of the female and male characters are that the female characters’ flaws are grounded in their marginalization as an Other, whereas the male characters are not all marginalized Others and their flaws can therefore not all be grounded in Otherness.

The male characters’ flaws vary greatly. For example we can mention Horace Benbow in *Flags in the Dust* (2012)who is described as being weak-minded and mostly following the wishes of the women around him. He is also mentioned to be a poet and to be dealing with his traumas after the war by making glassware. Horace’s flaw is that he inhabits feminine traits to such a degree that he is considered a feminized male and is not necessarily at the top of the patriarchal hierarchy. This leads to Narcissa’s subtle domination over him. We can also mention Joe Christmas in *Light in August (*2005) who has problems with race and women. He deals with these problems differently than Horace by being aggressive and confrontational and eventually killing Ms. Burden. Christmas inhabits very masculine traits compared to Horace and can even be seen as overly masculine. Christmas is also one of the few Otherized men due to his race, which is one root to his problems. Benbow’s and Christmas’ problems stem from different sources and backgrounds. On the other hand, even when the source of the characters’ problem is the same, the outcome might be vastly different. For example, in *The Sound and the Fury* (1995)*,* both Mr. Compson and Quentin are stuck in the southern past, but where Mr. Compson deals with it through alcoholism, Quentin becomes disillusioned and commits suicide. While the cause of their problems is the same, and can be argued to have been passed on from father to son, Mr. Compson’s and Quentin’s reactions to the problem are far from the same.

However, when it comes to the female characters and their flaws, Faulkner seems to have a schema that he follows. Many of the women, if not all, are described as being strong but with one major flaw. The characteristic of the strong woman is likely drawn from Faulkner’s own mother and Mammy Callie. To continue with *Light in August* (2005)Ms. Burden is an independent woman, living alone and providing help to black people in spite of the opinions of the people around her. Her major flaw is her excessive religiousness which makes her incapable of having a relationship with Christmas without being overwhelmed by guilt. Her flaw is thus grounded in her Otherness from men, where patriarchal society has dictated that women need to be virtuous. In *Flags in the Dust* (2012), Aunt Jenny is likewise a strong woman and she is the one who takes care of the reckless Sartoris men. She also possesses one major flaw, namely being stuck in the past. She is unable to let go of her belief that all Sartoris men are doomed to a violent end. She attempts to relent a little when Young Bayard’s son is born: ““He’s a Sartoris, all right,” Miss Jenny said, “but an improved model. He hasn’t got that wild look of ‘em. I believe it was the name. Bayard. We did well to name him Johnny”” (Faulkner, 2012, 395). Aunt Jenny’s inability to completely let go of the past is reflected in her calling the baby Johnny, which is also happens to be a Sartoris family name. Narcissa, the mother, however states that the baby is actually named Benbow which was her last name before she married into the Sartoris family. In her inability to let go of the past, Aunt Jenny presents an Other. Her role is as a family matriarch and she is therefore expected to protect the family legacy. However, protecting this legacy is restricting her choices as an Other because she is not able to move forward and develop her self. Likewise, Dilsey in *The Sound and the Fury* (1995)is a strong woman practically running the Compson household. However, her flaw can be argued to be of a more concrete nature, namely that she is black and therefore an Other. She is doomed to always obey other people and be regarded to be less of a person than the white family she serves. Contrarily, Mrs. Compson is strong in the way she dominates her family. As so many of Faulkner’s characters, her major flaw is that she is stuck in the past, and whenever the modern world threatens its advancement, she withdraws to her bedroom. Mrs. Compson’s flaw resembles Aunt Jenny’s as she is likewise stuck in the past and is restricted by her role as a marginalized woman. Mrs. Compson’s restrictions show in her retreat to sickness. She is following the idea of women as the weak sex as compared to men, using it as an excuse to avoid developing her self. Thereby, she places herself below men in the patriarchal hierarchy. By retreating to her bedroom, Mrs. Compson is unable to develop her identity because she cuts herself of from surrounding society.

When it comes to portraying problematic relationships and marriages, Faulkner draws on his own troubled marriage with Estelle. Watson writes: “Quentin’s Caddy may be read as the Estelle-who-once-was and Horace’s Belle Mitchell as the Estelle-who-might-be” (Watson, 71). This implies that Quentin is in part based on Faulkner himself and that Horace is an older Quentin and therefore also a Faulkner-who-might-be. It is certainly easy to see the similarities between Belle in *Light in August* (2005) and Estelle. Both had a drinking problem. Both lived in unhappy marriages until they divorced to marry their true love. Both second marriages turned sour partly due to the drinking. And in both cases there were children involved. As for Caddy and the Estelle-who-once-was, it should be remembered that Faulkner has stated that Caddy was partly based on the daughter he lost and the sister he never had. The suggestion here is therefore that Caddy is based on the relationship he had with Estelle when they were young and before she married another man.

Faulkner used experiences from his marriage for more than specific characters in his novels. He also used it to portray marriages in general. Just as with the father-son relationships, it is virtually impossible to find a truly happy marriage in Faulkner’s works. Even more so, throughout Faulkner’s literature there are only four weddings described and a majority of those wedding were not happy occasions. In *The Sound and the Fury* (1995) Caddy’s marriage took place because she was pregnant and ended once her new husband found out. Likewise, in *Absalom, Absalom* (2005) Ellen Coldfield’s and Sutpen’s wedding was interrupted when people started yelling at them and throwing objects at them. Faulkner used his own experience with marriage to portray marriages in his literary works, but he also had to make sure that he did not reveal too much as he still had to preserve his performance. Therefore, marriage troubles and weddings were embellished and dramatized to distort the factual experiences that Faulkner drew from.

When reading Faulkner’s personal letters, his works, seeing photographs of him, and hearing his interviews, a distinct impression emerges that William Faulkner was not just a complicated person, but several complicated personas in one. It seems virtually impossible to distinguish the real Faulkner from his performances, but perhaps that is the point. Faulkner created his performances in order to leave a specific legacy behind, and perhaps this legacy reflects Faulkner’s views on his surrounding world and what it would take to set yourself apart from the rest of society. Nonetheless, it can likewise be argued that even though Faulkner hid himself behind his performances, he still put forward his own opinions and his understanding of society. This would be particularly obvious through his interviews at Virginia University and through his literature. Although Faulkner of course prepared for the interview sessions at Virginia University, the questions were not preplanned and as such Faulkner’s answers can only be partly performance. Faulkner presents himself as a reflective author at the interviews, but his answers reflect his own thoughts and opinions and are not necessarily to ingratiate him to the students. As mentioned, Faulkner put forth opinions that would have seemed aggravating to the Virginian students, and he is therefore not appeasing them to win their admiration. When it comes to Faulkner’s literature, he writes from his own experiences and juggles this knowledge around to fit the points that he wants to convey to the readers. His works are grounded in his own observations and his own opinions regarding the culture in which he grew up.

1. **Faulkner’s Yoknapatawpha County**

It is of essence to speak of Yoknapatawpha County in greater length in order to gain a grander insight into Faulkner’s attachment and commitment to a fictional county created out of the real life county that he grew up in. Understanding the creation of Yoknapatawpha helps us understand Faulkner’s perception of art. Faulkner understood art as an autonomous and independent form of expression (Atkinson, 2006, 48). He claimed ownership of his fictional domain by publishing a hand-sketched map of Yoknapatawpha County where he addressed himself as “Sole Owner and Proprietor”. His creative process puts emphasis on the author himself, for example through the Yoknapatawpha hand-sketched map, but also through Faulkner’s experimental narrative style. These points make it clear to us that we must understand the author in order to understand his text. We must understand context in order to understand text and Yoknapatawpha is the context of nearly all of Faulkner’s novels.

* 1. **A Comparison of Lafayette County and Yoknapatawpha County**

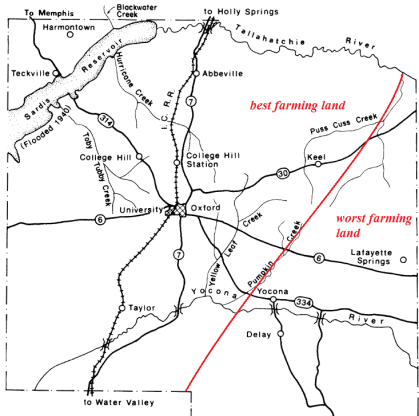
Professional critics and readers alike have noticed the parallels between Faulkner’s fictional Yoknapatawpha County and the real Lafayette County. Lafayette County is where Faulkner grew up and lived most of his life, and he himself has drawn attention to the fact that Yoknapatawpha is based at least in part on Lafayette County. Both counties are located in the state of Mississippi. Oxford is the political seat of Lafayette County, and Jefferson is the town around which most of Faulkner’s novels circulate. In *Light in August* (2005), Lena Grove travels to Jefferson to find the father to her unborn child. In *As I Lay Dying* (2004), the Bundren family transports the deceased Addie Bundren to Jefferson for her to be buried with the rest of her family. In *Flags in the Dust* (2012),Old Bayard is the president of his bank and he travels to Jefferson each day for work. In *Absalom, Absalom* (2005), we are told the story of plantation owner Thomas Sutpen and how he arrived in Jefferson and built Sutpen’s Hundred. But before we go into greater depth regarding the similarities of the two counties, let us first give an account for Lafayette County and the history behind Faulkner’s Southern roots and his literary creation of Yoknapatawpha County.

* + 1. **Lafayette County**

With Oxford as its county seat, Lafayette County was precisely 66 years old when Faulkner and his family moved there in 1902. The County was founded in 1836, and it was created from Chickasaw tribal land ceded in 1832 to the American Government.

Charles S. Aiken has discussed the repercussions of the Civil War on Lafayette County in his text *Faulkner’s Yoknapatawpha County: Geographical Fact into Fiction* from 1977. The American Civil War (1861-65) had aged the land beyond its actual years, and the war had both physical and financial consequences for Lafayette County. No outright battles ever took place within the county, but Union forces burned and looted the Lafayette countryside and parts of Oxford (4). The consequences of the war took form in financial ruin for the more prosperous Lafayette families, especially those who had invested in Confederate script and suffered greatly therefore when the Confederacy succumbed in ’65. Many men who marched to war also never returned to their families, shrinking the post-war workforce considerably and causing great trouble for the southern economy as a whole (4).

At the time of Faulkner, Lafayette County was a topographically diverse county. Two rivers ran parallel to the land, one up north and one down south. The Tallahatchie River was found up north and the Yocona River was found down south. The Yocona name was derived from an older Indian name “Yockeney-patafa” or Yoknapatawpha, which may also be how Faulkner found a name for his fictional Yoknapatawpha County (4).

Two soil types divided the land into two halves. As seen on figure 1, the divide was “drawn from the N.E. corner (the mouth of Pouskous Creek/Puss Cuss Creek) to the head of Yellow Leaf, down that creek to its mouth and thence nearly due S” (4).

The northern and western parts of the divide had the best soil for farming and were the most coveted as a result of their agricultural promise. This resulted in a large number of plantations being built in this area, plus the growth of a large black population that was to maintain these plantations.

Figure 1: A map of Lafayette County at the time of Faulkner, showing the divide in soil types and the socioeconomic segregation within the county with the richer families in the NW and the poorer families in the SE

On the opposite divide, the southern and eastern parts of Lafayette had the worst soil for farming. It consisted mostly of sandy summits, and although the Yocona River was fertile, it was nevertheless inferior to Tallahatchie. As such, the southern and eastern parts of Lafayette County became land mostly for white farmers with small holdings and no grand plantation owners (5).

Taking a closer look at Oxford during this time and period, the city consisted mostly of dirt and gravel roads, where the most important road ran northwest to Memphis 70 miles away. This road was severed in the 1930’s when the New Deal flood-control Sardis Reservoir (from the Tallahatchie River) flooded this area of Lafayette. With this important road being severed, this now put an emphasis on the importance of the railroad system (4). Illinois Central Railroad crossed from south to north through Oxford. It gave direct access to Jackson, the capitol of Mississippi, and New Orleans down in Louisiana (4). Oxford had one prominent black section called Freedman Town. Smaller black settlements were the Hollow and the community of Saint Paul. Saint Peter’s Cemetery, the town principal burial ground, was divided into racial sections by an invisible line (5).

* + 1. **Yoknapatawpha County**

The similarities between Lafayette County and Yoknapatawpha County are aplenty, indicating that Faulkner was much affected in his writing by the place in which he grew up as a child and would continue to live his life till the end.

Both are rectangular counties drained in the north by the Tallahatchie River and in the south by the Yocona/Yoknapatawpha River. Roads go in all directions except southwest, and Freedman Town in Oxford has been copied into Yoknapatawpha as Freedman Town with both areas being characterized as black settlements (Light in August, 2005, 87).

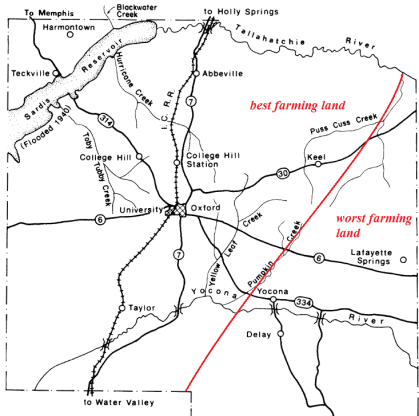
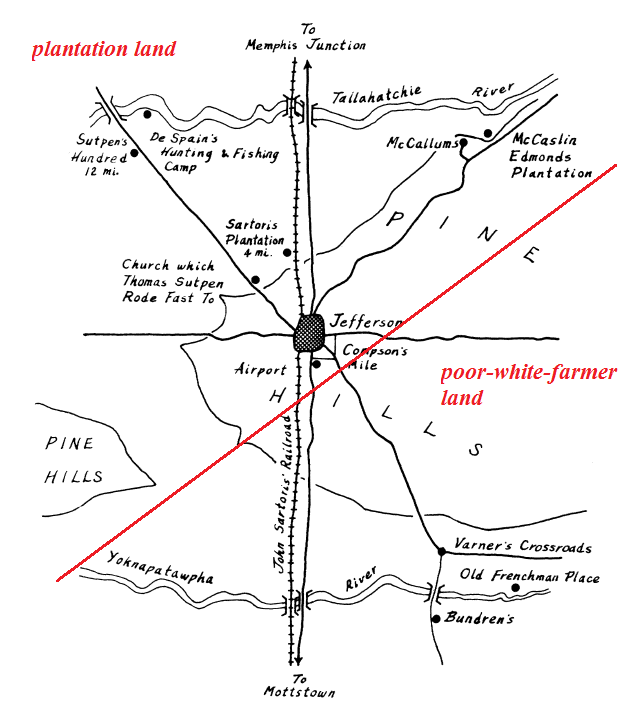
In Lafayette County there are two basic soil types that divides the land. The same holds true for Yoknapatawpha County. The northern and western areas are plantation areas, whilst the southern and eastern areas are poor white farmer areas. This is illustrated below in figure 2 and 3.

Figure 3

Figure 2

Both counties have the richer soil in the north-west and the poorer soil in the south-east. By examining the people of Yoknapatawpha, we can derive that the soils of Yoknapatawpha are similar to the soils of Lafayette. In Yoknapatawpha, the poorer south-east area is also called the Pine Hills area. Here, we have what Faulkner calls Frenchman’s Bend where the Snopes family lives. This family is described in *Flags in the Dust* (2012) as parasitic and as disliked by the Jefferson townsfolk:

“(…) a seemingly inexhaustible family which for the last ten years had been moving to town in driblets from a small settlement known as Frenchman’s Bend. Flem, the first Snopes, had appeared unheralded one day behind a counter of a small restaurant on a side street, patronized by country folk. With this foothold and like Abraham of Old, he brought his blood and legal kin household by household, individual by individual, into town and established themselves where they could gain money (…) [The restaurant] served as an alighting place for incoming Snopeses from which they spread to small third-rate businesses of various kinds (…) where they multiplied and flourished. The older residents, from their Jeffersonian houses and genteel stores and offices, looked on with amusement at first. But this was long since become something like consternation” (167)

In the Pine Hills, we have the Beat Four, which is a minor civil division of poor whites. Beat Four is poorer and more clannish than Frenchman’s Bend and the Snopeses. We can mention the clannish MacCallum family as an example of Beat Four: “MacCallum his name, one of a family of six brothers who lived eighteen miles away in the hills, and with whom Bayard and John hunted foxes and ‘coons during their vacations” (119). The MacCallums are white and live off of hunting. They get up at four in the morning to go hunting (340). They live in a house where“the floor was bare, of hand-trimmed boards scuffed with heavy boots and polished by the pads of generations of dogs” (332). The family distills moonshine whisky (335), and one of the sons to MacCallum Senior breeds a dog with fox (346). The road that leads to the house is “dim” and “infrequent” (359).

General Sartoris’ railroad in Yoknapatawpha County, which passes through Jefferson and goes north to Memphis and south to Mottstown, mimics the Illinois Central railroad that passes through Oxford in Lafayette County (Aiken, 1977, 5). As such, the town of Jefferson is plotted in the same location as Oxford in real life.

In another text by Charles S. Aiken from 1979, *Faulkner’s Yoknapatawpha County: A Place in the American South*, Aiken includes a hand-drawn sketch of Yoknapatawpha (figure 4), drawn by Faulkner himself. Faulkner drew this map in 1945 to explain why both Chickasaw and Choctaw Indians appear in his stories (337). The sketch shows us directly from Faulkner’s own hand that Jefferson in Yoknapatawpha County is located in the same spot as Oxford in Lafayette County. Curiously, Oxford is mentioned as a town itself in Yoknapatawpha County, meaning that Faulkner has removed Oxford from its real-life location in Lafayette and put Jefferson in its stead. Oxford is mentioned in *Absalom, Absalom* (2005) on page 99: “(…) seduced her along with himself from that distance between Oxford and Sutpen’s Hundred.”

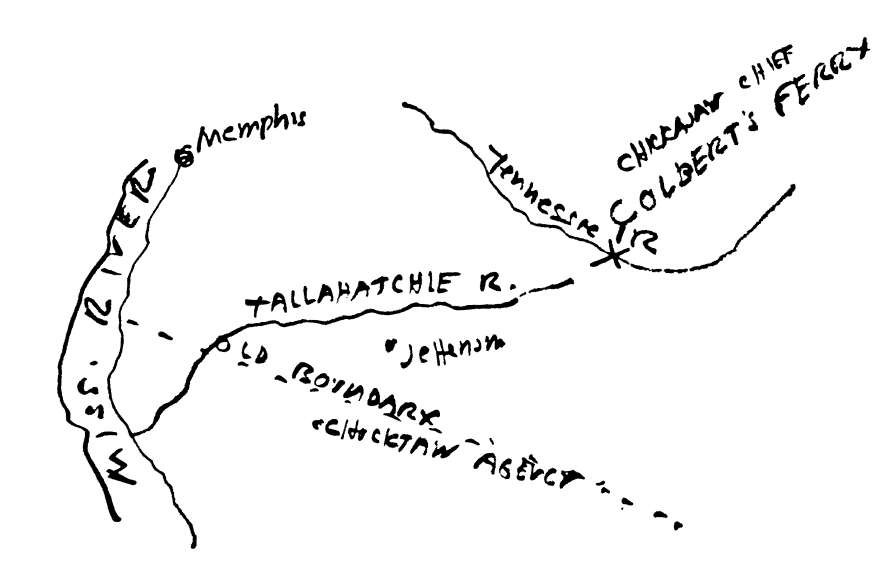
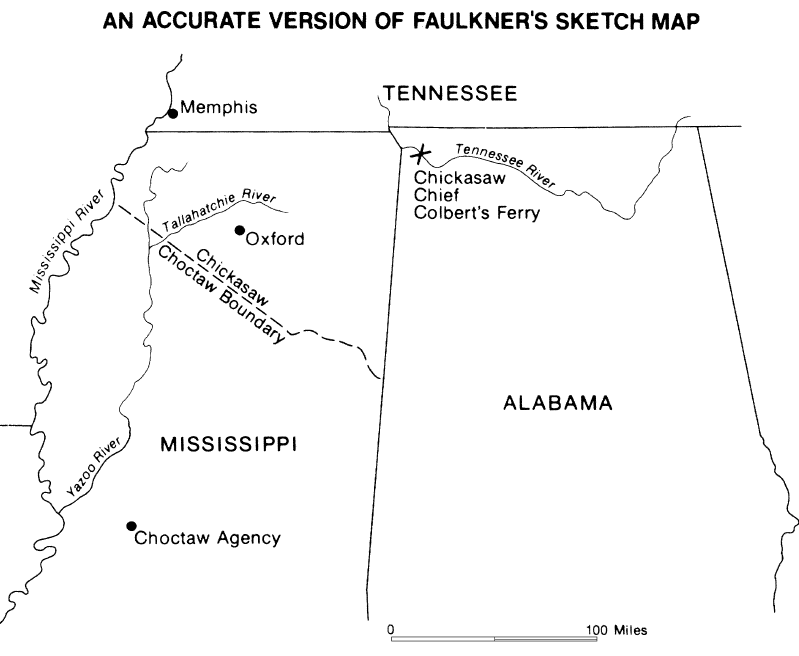


Figure 4: Hand-drawn map by Faulkner 1945

References to both the Chickasaw and the Choctaw are found respectively in *Absalom, Absalom* (2005) and in *Flags in the Dust* (2012). *Absalom, Absalom* refers to Ikkemotubbe, the Chickasaw that Thomas Sutpen bought his land from (55), while *Flags in the Dust* refers to the Choctaw tribe through Old Man Falls medicine for the wen on Old Bayard’s face that Old Man Falls claims is a recipe that his granny got from a Choctaw woman “nigh a hundred and thutty years ago” (227).

* + 1. **The Lowland South vs. The Upland South**

In Aiken’s second article, written two years after the first, Aiken introduces a more extensive perspective on the socioeconomic divide found in Yoknapatawpha County and in the South as a whole. He introduces the Lowland South vs. the Upland South.

Aiken plots Yoknapatawpha County in the upper part of the Lowland South, which again proves that Yoknapatawpha County is plotted in the spot of the real life Lafayette County, as seen in figure 5 (1979, 332):

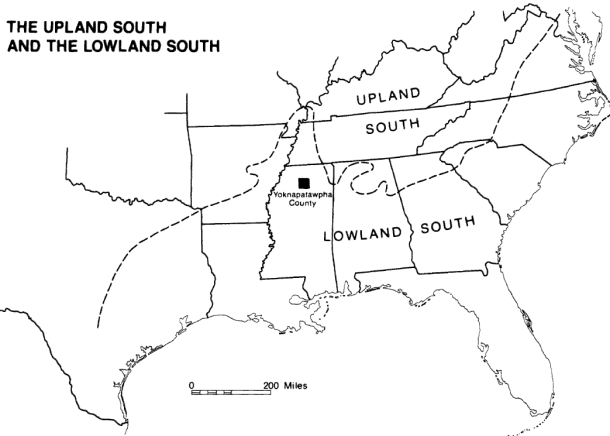


Figure 5: the plotting of Yoknapatawpha County

The Lowland South was the region with plantation tradition where rice, sugarcane, cotton and tobacco plants were grown in abundance. This is also called the old cotton belt where slavery produced a large black population to rival and eventually surpass the white population (332). In Yoknapatawpha County, the Lowland South is represented by the Sartoris family, the Sutpen family and the Compson family. These families were all plantation owners during their prime. On the other side of the spectrum, The Upland South was the region of yeoman-farmer tradition that emphasized grains and livestock for a living. Here, the black population never reached the same level as the Lowland South (332). The Upland South also had what Aiken calls a mountaineer culture that historically originated from the mountains of Appalachia. Aiken describes these Appalachian mountaineer people as living in log cabins, hunting for a living and producing moonshine whisky. They were an isolated people that historically allied themselves with the Union rather than the Confederacy, this probably being a consequence of how slavery was not at large in the Upland South since the inhabitants of this region were too poor to hold slaves (334).

In Yoknapatawpha County, examples of the Upland South would be the MacCallum family from *Flags in the Dust* (2012) with their lifestyle as hunters, and the Snopes family in Frenchman’s Bend with their life as farmers. Thomas Sutpen from *Absalom, Absalom* (2005)is moreover an excellent embodiment of the mountaineer culture that Aiken describes in his article. This is despite the fact that Sutpen grew up in West Virginia and not the Appalachian mountains*.* However, there is doubt as to whether it truly was West Virginia, since it is said that Sutpen was twenty-five years old in Mississippi in 1833 and there was no West Virginia in 1808 for him to have grown up in. This emphasizes the fact that Sutpen is also not aware of his true age, which in turn plays into the idea that the mountaineer culture bred and cultivated isolation and estrangement in its people (228). On page 221 of the novel, Faulkner describes Sutpen’s childhood and background in a paragraph that sums up most of Sutpen’s mountaineer traits, traits that also seem greatly reminiscent of the clannish MacCallum family:

“he was born where what few other people he knew lived in log cabins boiling with children like the one he was born in – men and grown boys who hunted or lay before the fire on the floor while women and older girls stepped back and forth across them to reach the fire to cook, where the only colored people were Indians and you only looked at them over your rifle sights, where he had never even heard of, or imagined, a place, a land divided neatly up and actually owned by men who did nothing but ride over it in fine horses or sit in fine clothes on the galleries of big houses while other people worked for them (…) so he didn’t even know that there was a country all divided and fixed and neat with a people living on it all divided and fixed and neat because of what color their skins happened to be and what they happened to own” (221).

When we consider how Sutpen built Sutpen’s Hundred on land that he had bought from “old Ikkemotubbe” (44), it is clear that Sutpen is comfortable with the Native Americans as a consequence of growing up around them up in the mountains. It also shows us that Sutpen, true to his mountaineer upbringing, had seen no blacks in his life before he moved to Yoknapatawpha.

With the divide between Upland and Lowland, Yoknapatawpha County can be seen as a replica of the South as a whole (Aiken, 1979, 334). Yet, although Yoknapatawpha can be seen as a replica of the South as a whole, one can argue against this idea, saying that Faulkner’s fictional place is an actual specific location in the Lowland South (Lafayette County) and that Yoknapatawpha thus cannot be seen as a replica of the South (335). Another point in the direction that Faulkner did not intend for Yoknapatawpha to mirror the South as a whole is the fact that “although Beat Four and Frenchman's Bend appear to be in the yeoman-farmer [and mountaineer] tradition of Upland South, close scrutiny of Faulkner's descriptions reveals that the inhabitants of these areas came from other parts of the South” (336). Upon closer inspection, the people of Beat Four (the MacCallums and Thomas Sutpen) are not mountaineers. Faulkner describes them as having migrated not from the mountains of Appalachia where the mountaineer folk originally came from. He describes them as having migrated from Scotland to Carolina, then from Carolina to Yoknapatawpha County. The people of Frenchman’s Bend came “from the northeast, through the Tennessee Mountains by stages marked by bearing and raising a generation of children” (336). Furthermore, during the Civil War, the people of Beat Four and Frenchman’s Bend were not Union sympathizers like the historical Appalachian mountaineers were, but they allied themselves with the planters and the Confederacy (336).

With the help of Faulkner’s own comments on the matter as taken from *Faulkner at West Point* (Joseph L. Fant, 1964), Aiken has summed up this question of whether or not Yoknapatawpha mirrors the South as whole:

“Although Faulkner was not attempting to draw a picture of the South, he took Yoknapatawpha from a geographical reality, and that reality was part of a greater geographical whole. Certain themes therefore are themes that were common to the South. But geographically Yoknapatawpha is a microcosm within the South rather than a microcosm of the South. Literarily, however, it is much more [than that]” (348).

* 1. **A Stereotype – the Yeoman Farmer and the Aristocrat**

The divide in Yoknapatawpha County between the rich plantation owners and the poorer white yeoman farmers can be argued to represent a stereotype of the South which has gained momentum over many decades. This stereotype concerns the yeoman farmers and how non-Southern readers may interpret these folk. This is a matter that Cleanth Brooks addresses in his book *William Faulkner, the Yoknapatawpha Country* (1990). When it comes to the MacCallums of the Beat Four and the Snopeses of the Pine Hills, all of which live in the south-east part of the Yoknapatawpha geographical divide and who represent the poorer whites, Cleanth Brooks explains how the white plantation owners pushed the poorer white families to the infertile land of the south-east Yoknapatawpha, and how these folk lived by small farming, the proceeds of which they used to hunt and fish (10). The MacCallums of the Beat Four are avid hunters and could be mentioned as an example. Brooks goes on to say about these people that:

“they are white people, many of them poor, and most of them living on farms; but they are not to be put down necessarily as “white trash”. It is with characters such as these that the non-Southern reader of Faulkner is likely to have most trouble. He may too easily conclude that the MacCallums (…) are simply poor white trash. Hasty or unobservant readers may even see them as allied to the infamous Snopes clan” (10).

The point that Brooks tries get across is the point that the people of the south-east should not be misunderstood as unimportant to the overall goings and doings of Yoknapatawpha County. They may be poor, but they make up a significant part of Yoknapatawpha County. As seen with the Snopes family, they originate from the Pine Hills, and yet they have migrated to Jefferson town and have made up camp for generations within the town while the Jefferson genteel crowd has looked on with consternation, but has been unable to stop them (Flags in the Dust, 2012, 167).

When it comes to the poor whites, Brooks says that they were presented by a large number of authors (Frederick L. Olmsted, George M. Weston, J. E. Cairne) as a “shiftless, illiterate and vicious group” (11). This is a stereotype that has become well established, but which is grossly oversimplified. Oversimplifications are attractive within literature as they add flavor to a story, much like Faulkner himself and his exaggerated self-presentations, and so this stereotype has been kept alive by much popular fiction of the present day. The poor white Southerner becomes almost a comical character (11).

This idea of the poor white as a comical character can be related to Shreve McCannon, Quentin’s Canadian roommate during Harvard, who views the whole of the American South as somewhat comical, as an attraction to behold for its entertainment value and its slow dissolution in a modern world: “’you mean she was no kin to you, no kin to you at all, that there was actually one Southern Bayard or Guinevere who was no kin to you? Then what did she die for?’ And that was not Shreve’s first time, nobody’s first time in Cambridge since September: *Tell about the South. What’s it like there. What do they do there. Why do they live there. Why do they live at all*” (Absalom, Absalom, 2005, 174).

Faulkner depicts the relationship between yeoman whites and old plantation aristocracy as being of a varied nature all depending on circumstance, which is in all likelihood a very realistic representation of any social structure in any country, the South included. In *Flags in the Dust* (2012), the MacCallums are presented as good friends and regular hunting companions of Young Bayard Sartoris. The MacCallums do not appear to have a lot in the way of money, but they appear to have a lot of independence and have land of their own. On the other hand, in *Absalom, Absalom* (2005), Thomas Sutpen’s relationship with his white handyman Wash Jones has a definite air of constraint to it. Sutpen tries hard to uphold his position as a prestigious plantation owner, since he was once turned away from a plantation as a poor kid and this prompted him to become a rich plantation owner himself in order to prove his worth and redeem himself. Wash Jones is not allowed inside the Sutpen house, only onto the arbor at most, and Wash seems to admire Sutpen the way that a poor boy would admire a rich boy by following orders without complaint and going the extra mile to please Sutpen, this in spite of how Sutpen could not care less, as proved by how he impregnates Wash’s granddaughter and turns her away without second thought when the child is a girl.

At last it should be noted how Brooks doesn’t say that Faulkner has presented a stereotyped view of the poor whites and aristocratic whites in his fiction, likewise poor blacks and privileged blacks. Brooks, in his book *William Faulkner: Toward Yoknapatawpha and Beyond*, puts the responsibility with the readers and their interpretation of Faulkner’s characters, boiling it down to a question of prejudice and presupposition in regards to the Old South versus the New South:

“The reader’s judgment of the Old South will seriously affect this estimate of the conflict between old and the new as represented in Faulkner’s novels. If the reader begins with sufficient prejudice against the Southern planter class (…) then he is likely to applaud automatically every rebel against the old ways and to dismiss every holdover from the old society as irrelevant” (1990, 176)

What we should understand first and foremost from analyzing Faulkner’s fictional Yoknapatawpha County is that it appears not just as the replica to Lafayette County, but also as a microcosm of the South as a whole, including the stereotypes of the South and Faulkner’s general apathy towards these. His microcosm is representative of the true historical American South, and it embodies much of the same political themes as the historical South, namely the themes of racism, classism and sexism in the shape of slavery, southernism and paternalism. This we shall see examined in the upcoming chapter.

1. **Faulkner’s Civil War and Political Standpoint**

It is important for us to offer political context to Faulkner’s works and insight into Faulkner’s own political stance at the time that he wrote and published his novels. For one, art often mimics real life. It is through art that we see real life politics and history mirrored back at us. It is a way for us to understand ourselves and the society that we live in. For another, while Faulkner was not directly apolitical (he has been referred to as anti-radical), he was wont to address political topics through his fiction. Writers of his time believed literature to be an agent of social and political change. This was in a time where the American nation suffered under what was arguably one of the largest American crises ever, the Great Depression of the 1930s (Atkinson, 2006, 224).

During the Depression, Americans could find cultural representations of the Civil War in abundance, particularly in literature (222), perhaps as a reaction to the similarities between the Depression and the war. Moreover, after the loss of the Civil War, creative arts flourished in the South as a cultural resistance to the loss, giving birth to southern literary achievements such as the Twelve Southerner’s anthology *I’ll Take My Stand.* Cleanth Brooks has said about Faulkner that it is “reasonable to believe that Faulkner was using the Civil War generation to point up the distempers of the modern age” (1990, 174). He must have seen parallels between the Depression and the war, and this also indicates how Faulkner understood discriminatory social conditions of the Civil War to have survived into the Depression.

All this considered, it is also important for us to discuss the Civil War and Faulkner’s interpretation of this, since Faulkner himself has made use of the Civil War as a cultural representation of the modern age, including the Depression under which he published many of his larger works, including *As I Lay Dying* (2004), *Light in August* (2005),and *Absalom, Absalom* (2005).

* 1. **Faulkner’s Understanding of Southern Identity in the Antebellum South**

The American Civil War had longstanding consequences for American society. Debates over slavery, immigration and paternalism all contributed to the formation of the Confederacy, and these debates still have an effect on today’s modern perception of the American South. Likewise, we see the same debates and themes mirrored in Faulkner’s authorship. These debates were rooted in American politics, more specifically in the Two Party System that consisted of the pro-southern Democrats and the pro-northern Whig Party (later The Republican Party after the election of 1856).

While slavery has in later times been viewed as the largest contributing factor to the outbreak of the war, this is not completely correct. Slavery was indeed a large debate that sectionalized the North and the South, primarily because slavery in the South was a large regional economic industry and a social institution, while the industrialization of the North pushed this part of the US towards commerce and textiles industries. This made the North dependent on the raw materials (such as cotton) of the South, which then made the South dependent on the textiles industries and commerce of the North. This created a conflict between the two sections. The South felt as though they were commercially exploited and victimized by the North and their protective tariffs and internal improvement bills (Donald, 2001, 46), whilst the North felt as though the agrarian South dominated the national government with their oppositional view towards more liberal immigration laws and a cheaper overseas workforce (75).

The question of slavery was arguably one of the largest contributing factors to the outbreak of the war, but it is in fact part of a much larger contributing factor, namely the struggle within American politics regarding the rights of the states and the role of the federal government.

At the time of the Civil War the Democrat Party supported the right of the state while the newly formed Republican Party supported a strong federal government. The Democrats supported the strength of the state and had a strong political base in southern states while the Republican Party supported the strength of the federal government and maintained a strong constituency in the North. When the southern states started seceding from the Union in 1861, they formed a new looser central government called the Confederate States of America. Several decades later in 1930 Franklin D. Roosevelt was elected as president and the two parties swapped political positions in part due to Roosevelt being a democrat and a socialist. The 4 term presidency of FDR eventually left us with the American political parties of today which is in essence a reversed platform of what they were at the outbreak of the Civil War.

The American Civil War, like every over civil war in any other country, emerged out of a set of political, economic, and social discrepancies that differentiated the North from the South and which led to an eventual war between the two sections. It is imperative to outline these discrepancies in order to understand how they led to the formation of the Confederacy.

Out of the many discrepancies that led to the eventual outbreak of the war, we will focus on the ones that are of importance to Faulkner’s literary works and to our analysis of these. Amongst these are slavery, southernism and the paternalistic family structure of the South.

* 1. **Slavery and *Light in August* (2005)**

Slavery and racism in the US has its roots in the slave trade of the Western Hemisphere that took place from the 15th century up through the 19th century. In Europe, the forced-labor system of African slavery never took hold as it did in the Americas. The US maintained slavery for much longer than the rest of the world due to its institutional usage in agriculture. The practice stretched into the 19th century even as it faced growing criticism (52). This was due in large part to how well slavery worked for agricultural crops like cotton and tobacco, labor intensive cash crops, and the lack of available workers. The new societal setting allowed for slavery to grow and become part of the economic framework of the New World. In contrast, Europe had established agricultural and economic systems in which the countries of Europe had less space and need for large-scale slavery. Less space and higher populations prevented slavery from taking hold in Europe as it did in the Americas. Instead, Europe established agrarian models of peasantry in the west and serfdom in the east.

The import of slaves in the US (the slave trade) was abolished in 1808. The actual practice of slavery was fully abolished in the US in 1865 with the adoption of the 13th amendment to the Constitution, although it would take almost another hundred years for discriminatory legal practices that marginalized African Americans to disappear altogether, particularly in the South.

In modern society, one may be predisposed to say that the South was pro-slavery and that the North was anti-slavery, but it is more complicated than that. Early attitudes towards slavery in the prewar US shows us that just as the North and the Republicans were not united in their opposition to slavery, so too the South and the democrats were not united in supporting slavery. Likewise, modern perception of slavery is portrayed as a starkly inhuman practice. However southern plantation owners found ways to justify the practice. Slave-owners saw their slaves as property and recognized that if they damaged their property the business would not be fully functional and would not bring home as much profit for the plantation (63).

Over time divisions began to emerge with the South as pro-slavery and the North as anti-slavery as the practice became entrenched as a regional economic system in the South during the mid-1800s. At this time, the North strived on free farming, rapidly growing industries, banking and technology. The North also developed stronger humanitarian concerns primarily off the back of the Second Great Awakening, an evangelical movement in the early 1800s that looked upon slavery with horror and disgust considering it to be entirely at odds with Christian scripture. All this brought along a commercial and social system in the North that had no need for slavery, while the economic system in the South was built upon the highly profitable system of slavery alone. The profit came from how slaves were provided with food and housing that amounted only to 22 percent of their output on the plantation, cutting a profitable deal for the plantation-owners (72). However, the problem with slavery as a profitable system was that it relied heavily on geographical limits and non-overproduction of the land. After the war and the Republican victory, the cotton prices plummeted partly as a consequence of this, making slavery a less profitable institution: “Yet, Southern economic growth, which at this point was based on the production of stable crops, was sustained only by putting more and more land into cultivation, not as in the North by the evolution of a developed economy” (72).

Also at issue was the expansion of new states in the west and the expansion of slavery. Southern legislators argued that new states should be able to decide on their own whether to allow slavery or not. By the early to middle 19th century all the northern states had prohibited slavery and opposed the expansion of the practice to new territory. Several arrangements were set and broken over slavery’s expansion. This led to increased tension between the South and the North. The South felt that states should have the option to decide, and the North felt that new states should not be allowed to make decisions on slavery.

At its prime in the decades leading up to the war, slavery in the South was so highly profitable that slave-owners were loath to give up on their plantations and their way of life which was firmly entrenched in the forced-labor system. The opposition of new states establishing slavery caused tension with southern states that increasingly viewed slavery as under attack. This fear of losing slavery, the economic driving force of the South, eventually culminated in the American Civil War:

“Slavery had become for them a way of life; they took it as a matter of course. The sense of social stability, based on antagonism toward innovation and pride in the distinctiveness of southern life, operated as a determining force. And the hardening of these attitudes before the war made this anachronistic institution [slavery] crucial to the growing differences between North and South” (73).

Out of all of Faulkner’s literary creations, Mrs. Burden in *Light in August* (2005)exemplifies the racial repercussions of the Civil War and the post-war relationship between the Yankees and the Confederacy the best. She herself is not black, but she sympathizes greatly with the black population of Jefferson. This has made her an outcast in town, which shows us Faulkner’s interpretation of the still-there divide between the North and the South:

“She lives in the big house alone, a woman of middle age. She has lived in the house since she was born, yet she is still a stranger, a foreigner whose people moved in from the North during Reconstruction. A Yankee, a lover of negroes, about whom in the town there is still talk of queer relations with negroes in the town and out of it, despite the fact that it is now sixty years since her grandfather and her brother were killed on the square by an exslave-owner over a question of negro votes in a state election (…) But it is there: the descendants of both in their relationship to one another a ghost, which between them the phantom of the old spilled blood and the horror and the anger and fear” (LIA, 37)

She is from a long line of abolitionists originating from the North, and she is engaged in the promotion of Negro schools through visits and letter-writing campaigns. Additionally, Negro women come to her house for advice “following paths which had been years in the wearing and which radiated from the house like wheelspokes” (193). She also suggests to Joe Christmas, after finding out about his heritage, that he attend a Negro lawyer school (208). However, as much as Mrs. Burden is a supporter of the black race, she also paradoxically plays into the stereotype of the black man as a primitive figure below the refinement and poised character of white men. She does this through her treatment of Christmas and her approach to their sexual relationship:

“Now and then she appointed trysts beneath certain shrubs about the grounds, where he would find her naked, or with her clothing half torn to ribbons upon her, in the wild throes of nymphomania (…) she would be wild then, in the close, breathing halfdark without walls, with her wild hair, each strand of which would seem to come alive like octopus tentacles, and her wild hands and her breathing: ‘Negro! Negro! Negro!’” (195)

It is hard to decide whether she plays into this stereotype consciously or unconsciously as a result of the southern influences that she lives under. Sex between different races is considered miscegenation, and if she engages in this consciously, it may be an act of rebellion against the southern society she lives in, but if she engages in it unconsciously, it may be a reflection of how steadfast and influential the southern race mentality truly is. Of all Faulkner’s characters, Mrs. Burden perhaps best sums up the relationship between the white man and the black man on page 191 of the novel: “The curse of the black race is God’s curse. But the curse of the white race is the black man who will forever be God’s chosen own because He once cursed Him.”

* 1. **Southernism and *Absalom, Absalom* (2005)**

In a society based on a forced-labor economical system arose a regional self-consciousness and self-awareness that separated the rural South from the industrialized North. A regionalism arose, one that the so-called “Southrons” thought to be their highest expression of loyalty to their region (Donald, 2001, 45). This self-consciousness later morphed into nationalism within the South: “By the mid-1850s, this group consciousness based on Southern distinctiveness and defensiveness hardened into a cultural and political nationalism” (47).

It had not always been like this. There had once been belief in intellectual circles of the South that slavery would become extinct and that the economy of the region would be diversified with industry similar to that in New England in the North (46). Gradually, however, the South came to diverge in priority from the North, this happening through differentiating “systems of economy, modes of literature, methods of education, practices of religion and the conduct of politics” (46). In particularly, the invention of the cotton gin made slavery into a highly profitable institution. On top of this, the diversification between North and South was spurred on by the agricultural depression from 1819-1832, which had southern farmers and planters believe that they were being victimized by federal bills designed to assist the North. The South felt resent towards what they called “the degrading shackles of commercial dependence on the North” (46). All of this contributed to the growing regional nationalism within the South, indicating that what had once been a regional identity within a federal system had now morphed into southern nationalism. As the North turned to abolitionism, the South defended and justified their way of life with slavery as an economic status symbol: “By the 1850’s the Constitution had been wrenched in every conceivable direction to provide legal guarantees for the maintenance of slavery” (48).

Southernism, or southern nationalism, became interchangeable with southern identity. The South developed a mental and social pattern that was distinctively southern, one with specific values, thought processes and prejudices attached. One of the values that truly set the South apart from the North was the notion of honor. Honor worked as the “desired moral framework for behavior” in the southern identity. Southerners now developed a traditionalist ethical code that praised physical valor, approval of others (reputation) and a concern for personal autonomy (47).

This Southern mentality of honor and reputation is best illustrated by Quentin Compson in *Absalom, Absalom* (2005)and *The* *Sound and the Fury* (1995). Quentin’s southern identity is deeply rooted in the notion of honor as a quality by which you are judged by others and around which your reputation revolves. Quentin’s obsession with his sister Caddy’s virginal innocence is one such example of his concern with reputation. When Caddy becomes pregnant outside of wedlock, he offers to run away with her and tells their father that her unborn child is also his child, implicating incest. Likewise, in *Absalom, Absalom*, Quentin becomes obsessed with Thomas Sutpen as a symbol of “the old times” during the Civil War. This was a time in which reputation and honor held more value than what they do now in Quentin’s life, as exemplified by Caddy who refuses to bow down to the principle of honor and would rather live her life as a tainted woman instead of letting Quentin restore her and their family’s honor.

Quentin’s dilemma, how he his caught up in an old principle of honor that no longer exists as strongly in the modern 1900s as it did in the 1800s nationalistic South, comes to the forefront of *Absalom, Absalom* during the very last paragraph of the novel where Quentin is asked why he hates the South: “I don’t hate it, he thought, panting in the cold air, the iron New England dark; I don’t. I don’t! I don’t hate it! I don’t hate it!” (378). It is clear from this quote and Quentin’s eventual suicide that Quentin is damaged psychologically from trying to follow a moral code that does not belong in the time that he lives in, but which belongs to a time around the Civil War of the 1860s. Here, we can mention Henry Sutpen and Charles Bon as upholders of honor in the timeframe of the Civil War in which honor was of more importance than in the timeframe of the 1920s and Quentin. Henry Sutpen is willing to kill his best friend, Charles Bon, for the sake of honor, and Charles Bon himself is prepared to die for the sake of honor.

* 1. **Paternalism and *Absalom, Absalom* (2005)**

The paternalistic family structure in the South was particularly strong in the decades leading up to the Civil War. There was a social parallel between marriage and slavery in the South that promoted racial and sexist egalitarianism. This parallel was based on the subordination to the white patriarch of a household which gave more power and authority to southern men over the female and black members of their households: “One of the chief laws in the Old South… was to uphold patriarchal authority, providing individual heads of households with the right to police their own spheres” (Donald, 2001, 35).

At the time of the Civil War, nowhere in the US was the male patriarch more influential than in southern domestic law. This was in part due to how the South was less likely to recognize individual rights of family members, leading to female household members that lacked a collective identity like the one found in their northern counterparts (34). This, in turn, was in part due to how slavery had created a culture in which any change to the female status would be a potential threat to the social order created from black slaveholding, not to forget that given the agrarianism of the South, it was difficult for women to physically meet up with each other in order to create this collective identity. Slaveholding women in particular understood themselves first and foremost as wives and mothers, while northern women had started to see themselves as individuals beyond their family roles, considering their public rights, forming unions and educating themselves beyond the mother role (35). However, this is not to say that all southern women were unaware of this discrepancy and felt that they were treated justly by their husband and fathers in matters pertaining to sexual freedom and expression (45).

Paternalism in the South was reinforced by the forced-labor system. The slave-owners took care of their slaves, seeing them as their property, to the length that they could function properly in the field and bring home profit for the plantation. This required a certain sort of paternalistic care and authority over the slaves, which was augmented by the fact that many slaves had lived with and worked for their employers since birth, creating an emotional attachment:

“It was “natural” (…) that masters would deal “kindly” with dependents they had raised, just as it was normal for slaves to look for protection and direction from those who cared for them. Such paternalistic understanding was predicated on the master’s belief that he was a benevolent patriarch who, as parent with child and husband with wife, looked after his “people”, caring for them and when necessary punishing them” (57)

This same view of the planters of the Old South as being paternalistic rather than capitalistic has been expressed by Cleanth Brooks. He cites historian Eugene Genovese as highlighting the importance of the relationship between master and slave in the Old South of which he suggests that the planters should not be labeled capitalistic, despite the economic system that was slavery, given the general backwardness of the South in comparison to the industrialized and capitalistic North (1990, 285). He instead puts emphasis on the relationship between master and slave, paternalism, as being the driving force and strongest characteristic of the Old South:

“The distinctly southern sense of extended family cannot be understood apart from the social structure at the center of which stood the plantation, and it provided a powerful impetus for social cohesion, ruling-class hegemony, and the growth of a paternalistic spirit that far transcended master-slave and white-black relationships” (291).

On the surface, Thomas Sutpen comes to mind as an example of the paternalistic plantation owner whose wealth and high status has been acquired in one generation which was the norm for the Deep South in which Yoknapatawpha is located (284). Sutpen keeps his slaves company rather than the other white plantation owners of Jefferson of which he remains secretive and detached. For example, he hosts fist fights with his Negro slaves in his stables “fighting not as white men fight, but as Negroes fight to hurt one another quick and bad” (Absalom, Absalom, 2005, 29). This may also be a side-effect of growing up in the mountains where there lived no blacks, and as such he is removed from the predisposed racial stereotypes of southern plantation life. Likewise, he also keeps regular company with Wash Jones, a “white trash” handyman who squats on Sutpen’s land (181). Wash Jones also admires Sutpen greatly, calling him a “fine figure” even after Sutpen returns after the war and is irreparably damaged (184).

It can be argued that Sutpen treats his white servants with a sort of mild generosity that comes from how Sutpen himself used to be poor white trash. However, as mild as this generosity seems, it also seems rooted in Sutpen’s own selfish gains, as proven by how Sutpen only permits Wash Jones to come to the arbor of his mansion in order to drink with him after Jones begins to bring fish and other provisions for Sutpen as symbolic payment (183). When it comes to the women in his family, Sutpen treats his daughter Judith like he treats his son Henry, with respect and care for the continuation of his bloodline, though not with much genuine love. The same counts for his treatment of his wife, once again proving that Sutpen aims for selfish goals even in the case of love of which he seems incapable (18).

It is not in Sutpen’s nature to be magnanimous, as shown in the case when he impregnates Wash Jones’ granddaughter and leaves her to fend for herself promptly after discovering that the child is a girl and therefore useless to his bloodline, but it is rather in his nature to be dismissive and aloof towards all people unless they satisfy a specific need for him. Another example of this is how he chases down his white French architect with his dogs after this man has tried to escape Sutpen’s grasp. As such, Sutpen does not restrain himself to black chattel slavery alone when it comes to achieve the overall goal in his life which is to become a successful plantation owner. This is Sutpen’s version of paternalism, and it a version that Cleanth Brooks calls cruel:

“Paternalism, of course, can be cruel. History and literature abound in overbearing fathers. But Sutpen’s treatment of other human beings, including his own flesh and blood, is something else. His ruthless acts are (…) the calculated machinations of a man completely absorbed in his cold dream of self-vindication” (1990, 300).

So while Thomas Sutpen on the surface appears to embody the paternalistic southern plantation owner, he is in fact also far removed from any sense of southern paternalism through his absorption in a self-vindication that stems from the one moment in his childhood where he was turned away from a plantation by a black servant. According to his own lights, however, he is a just and honorable man, particularly in the case of his first Haitian wife, which he thought himself to have accepted in good faith (300). Suffice to say, then, that Sutpen’s own lights are somewhat lacking when compared to the collective morality of Jefferson and Old South paternalism as a whole.

* 1. **Faulkner in Political Context**

Most of Faulkner’s (later) critically acclaimed novels were written in the political climate of the 1930s. What Faulkner predicted in *The* *Sound and the Fury* (1929) with Jason and the dropping stock market prices in cotton was in reality the oncoming of the crash of the American stock market and the Great Depression. With the Depression, American society left behind the Roaring Twenties in favor of much more dire times to come. USA had emerged from World War I as a new world power with an admirable industrial capacity (Atkinson, 2006, 16). This had spun the nation into the splendor and pomp of the Roaring Twenties. Here, another modernist writer comes to mind as representative of the Roaring Twenties, namely F. Scott Fitzgerald with *The Great Gatsby* (1925). With the Wall Street Crash in 1929, however, the Depression began and the US left all pomp and splendor behind. Incidentally, with the Depression, some of Faulkner’s best works were written, including *As I Lay Dying* (2004), *Light in August* (2005)and *Absalom, Absalom* (2005).

In the years of the Depression, Faulkner tethered constantly on the brink of economic ruin due to faulty investment strategies, this in spite of how his novels had begun to sell: “not surprisingly, socioeconomic themes pervade Faulkner’s fiction of the Depression” (Atkinson, 2006, 50). In Faulkner’s novels, we see this personal socioeconomic decline best exemplified in the case of the Compson family and the Sutpen family, although economic ruin remains a theme in all of Faulkner’s works. In the case of Joe Christmas in *Light in August* (2005), socioeconomic decline is the driving force of his life that leads him to bootlegging, and in the case of Anse in *As I Lay Dying* (2004), money is the driving force that leads him to acquire a new set of teeth and a new wife. The Sartoris family from *Flags in the Dust* (2012) may be the only family that has not undergone a socioeconomic decline as large as all the other families. It is important to note that the reason for this is that the Sartoris family has managed to adapt to the Northern ideals of banking and commerce after the end of the Civil War as represented by Old Bayard’s position as a bank owner in Jefferson. The Sartoris family did not decline economically or socially because they gave up on their Old South identity and adapted to the New South after the Civil War.

Faulkner was an anti-radical Democrat (Atkinson, 2006, 52). As such, Franklin D. Roosevelt’s New Deal in 1933 was a difficult ideological dilemma for Faulkner. This dilemma bled into his writing and has remained an important factor in later analyses of Faulkner’s works (50). The New Deal was Roosevelt’s attempt to bring the American nation out of its Depression, and it was the largest expansion of federal government in the United States by any measure. The American Democrat Party in its classic form was not in favor of a federal government, but were supporters of regionalism and classic liberalism. They wanted to “maintain a proper balance between the power of the federal government and the authority of state governments and localities” (29). This held particularly in the South where classic liberalism had become part of the South’s political identity (29). Yet FDR was not just a Democrat president. He was also a socialist president. He spoke of a reformed liberalism more attuned to communal and cooperative values than the classic values of self-reliance, regionalism and independence (28). Roosevelt wanted interdependence and a grander social consciousness (25). Faulkner could stand by some of the facets of The New Deal, such as the Work Progress Administration (WPA) and the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA). However, these particular developmental changes also spoke strongly of nationwide social engineering and were thus a bane to the regional and individual self-reliance that Faulkner promoted in his fiction and in his own life (51).

So while Faulkner was a democrat like FDR, he was an increasingly dissatisfied anti-FDR/New Deal democrat in a time when the American Democrat Party underwent fundamental political changes, changes that laid the groundwork for the eventual rise of the Republican Party in the South and the reversed American political system that we find in today’s world (31).

One could be tempted to believe that since Faulkner identified as a southern democrat, his political stance on racial politics would lean towards pro-racism, since this is the general predisposition in the South, consequence of the Civil War. However, when asked directly in a Virginia University interview whether he feels that the best solution to race integration would be race assimilation, Faulkner gave an answer that is directly anti-racist in that it speaks of equality between races:

“No, sir, I don't think that that would—would solve many problems. The same amount of—of bickering would go on, and they would find another subject for it. I think that the only thing that will solve that problem is—is not integration but equality, for the Negro to know that he has just as much and just as valid rights in this country as anybody else has. That his money is just as secure. His children have a right to just as good an education as anybody else does. His vote counts as much as anybody else's” (Ribble, 2/20/58).

One could say that Faulkner addresses racial politics through his fiction, and yet he himself has said that he never explicitly intended to write politics into his fiction, but that he merely wrote the life that he saw unfold around him, black and white people alike. He was interested in character development, he claims, although his grand interest in character development did eventually lead him to create a complete fictional county with racial and gender politics aplenty:

“I'm not expressing my own ideas in the stories I tell. I'm telling about people, and these people express ideas which—which sometimes are mine, sometimes are not mine, but I myself am not trying to satirize my country. I love it, and it has its faults, and I will try to correct them, but I wouldn't try to—to correct them when I'm writing a story, because I'm telling—talking about people then”(Gwynn, 4/15/57).

Faulkner did not identify as a supporter of blacks, nor the opposite. He remained relatively neutral on the subject, opting for writing down the culture and daily life of the South as it he saw it unfold around him. Nonetheless, as we have mentioned earlier, he did once proclaim in a Virginia University interview that slavery was and remains the demon of the South, a demon that needs to be exorcised in order for the South to move on.

Interestingly, in regards to the industrialization of the US, Faulkner is of the personal opinion that you cannot fight change in society. If you do, you will cease to exist. In that sense, Faulkner believes that you must adapt to the changes in society if you wish to remain a part of society, and this is a stance that is startlingly non-Southern:

“It may be that you won't like to see industrialization. You won't like to see the old customs change. But the only alternative to change is—is to cease, to die. And I think that—that any culture that's worth its salt is going to cope with any change. That industrialization is not going to destroy anything of value in the South (…) every man is—is the sum of his past, of his ancestry, and so there's nothing ever ends in that sense. As long as somebody remembers it, it still exists. The good of it will still exist, still be available” (Blotner, 5/12/58).

Additionally, he also addresses the question of the Negro in regards to slavery. Here, he explains how he believes that the agrarian culture was the only culture that the white man bothered to train the Negro in. It was the only culture where the Negro was an integral part to the economic system, the only culture where the Negro was assimilated, no matter the somewhat disreputable nature of that assimilation. As the agrarian culture vanishes and eventually disappears, the Negro will become more and more of a problem given that he becomes superfluous to the white man’s needs: “…the white man will have to do something to—to substitute that agrarian economy, which took care of the Negro (…) there's no other contact with the white man's culture that the Negro has since he was—since he left the agrarian economy of slavery” (Ribble, 2/20/58).

1. **Kierkegaard and Sartre**

Faulkner was interested in the human heart, particularly the human heart in conflict. As such, his writings are centered on his characters and the characterization thereof. The human heart in conflict is a theme that resonates with existentialism. Faulkner wrote about the world as he saw it unfold around him. He wrote what he saw. His writings thus come to encompass both the lives of whites and black, of women and men – of the human heart in conflict no matter what package that human heart is wrapped up in.

Existentialists are found aplenty, yet two of them are of interest to us in our analysis of Yoknapatawpha County. This is Søren Kierkegaard, early founder of existentialism, and Jean-Paul Sartre, one of the first philosophers to coin existentialism and to popularize it. Used together, they serve to put the individual at the forefront of society and to illuminate the importance of individual identity against the masses. Kierkegaard speaks of the self as a process, the base concept of existentialism, while Sartre adds to Kierkegaard’s theories with a focus on self-awareness in regards to choice-making and Otherness. As a philosopher, Sartre may fit Faulkner’s particular brand of thought better than Kierkegaard, particularly in regards to piety of which Sartre and Faulkner both had little to none. This is a consequence of them living around the same period of time, the mid-1900s, whereas Kierkegaard lived in the mid-1800s.

* 1. **Søren Kierkegaard – The Despairing Self**

Kierkegaard speaks of identity in the chief sense of a person not conquering its own self and thus comes to live its life in despair. Kierkegaard’s theory concerns itself with the basic understanding of how an identity first and foremost comes into being and how it operates in relation to oneself and to others. He was especially interested in faith and Christianity. This is an angle that we will not deploy in our analysis of Faulkner, ergo we will not go into greater depths regarding Kierkegaardian faith and Christianity, but we will focus on his understanding of the self as a process to be undertaken.

As one of the recognized early founders of existentialism, Kierkegaard rightfully broke with the belief of the self as an unmovable essence. In the introduction to his acclaimed book *Sickness Unto Death* (2014), he speaks of the self as in relation to itself, postulating that the self is that which relates itself to itself. This lays the foundation for Kierkegaardian philosophical thought which is based on the belief that the self is a process. You are not yourself, but you must become yourself (11).

Kierkegaard understands the self as a synthesis of the infinite and the finite, as a relationship between possibility and necessity: “The self is composed of infinity and finiteness (…) The self is freedom. But freedom is the dialectical element in the terms possibility and necessity” (29).This is where Kierkegaard breaks with the belief of the self as an unmovable essence. With the self as a synthesis, as two factors, one factor will always be the opposite of the other, demonstrating how development must exists in between these two forces that clash and pull in either direction. Here, Kierkegaard stresses the importance of self-knowledge. The more that the self knows, the more it knows itself (32). Self-knowledge can loosely be translated into experience and action, since these are the main influencers on how your self comes to know more of itself.

Kierkegaard hereby speaks of not being yourself (an essence), but of becoming yourself (a process). However, this angle is a tricky one, because while Kierkegaard indicates that you must become yourself through action and experience and thus through choice, he also indicates that you are destined to become something specific. He indicates that there is a core within every individual, one that you cannot escape. Yet this core is not something that you are born with. It is not an essence, not something that God has given you. It is something that you are conditioned into becoming. It consists of your actions and your past life experiences. In this sense, you do not just become yourself, but you must acknowledge and ratify yourself based on past experienced in order to become and realize yourself:

“For every man is primitively planned to be a self, appointed to become oneself; and while it is true that every self as such is angular, the logical consequence of this merely is that it has to be polished, not that it has to be ground smooth, not that for fear of men it has to give up entirely being itself, nor even that for fear of men it dare not be itself in its essential accidentality (which precisely is what should not be ground away), by which in fine it is itself” (34)

Kierkegaard’s chief concern is with the despairing self, this insofar that the self does not become itself and it thus falls into despair at not being itself. The despair arises when the self is unable to conquer and confirm itself. Kierkegaard believes that in order to become yourself, you must conquer the negativity of not being yourself. You must face what you are not in order to acknowledge what you are. It is here that an individual can end up in despair and anguish if it is unable to confirm its own self.

Kierkegaard transfers the problematic of the despairing self into sets of dichotomies.

We have already addressed the dichotomy of infinity and finiteness which created two clashing forces within the self. A second dichotomy, the dichotomy of possibility and necessity, is an extension of that. Kierkegaard says of the self: “inasmuch as it is itself, it is the necessary, and inasmuch as it has to become itself, it is a possibility” (36). If possibility outruns necessity, the self runs away from itself, since it has no necessity that it is bound to anymore. The self is thus left floundering between possibilities, between choices, and it has no way of returning to necessity and cannot become itself, thus falling into despair (36). Likewise, if necessity outruns possibility, the self will also end up in despair: “[if] a human existence is brought to the pass that it lacks possibility, it is in despair, and every instant it lacks possibility it is in despair” (38). Here, Kierkegaard gives the examples of the determinist and the fatalist person as being forever in despair. He has lost his own self, because for him everything is necessary and he therefore lacks possibility (41).

A third dichotomy addresses conscious and unconscious despair. A man can either be conscious of his despair by ignoring it, or he can be unconscious of it. Kierkegaard claims that the unconscious despair is the most common form of despair in the world (46). He says of the unconscious despair that it is harder to conquer than the conscious despair: “Despair itself is a negativity, [being] unconsciousness of it is a new negativity” (45). The unconscious man is therefore one step behind the conscious man in conquering his despairing self and becoming his true self. He feels well and considers himself in the best of health, yet he is in fact the very opposite and feels an unconscious despair so grand that he is blind to it.

For the conscious despair, on the other hand, it is a precondition that one must understand what despair is in order to understand that one is experiencing it. The conscious despair is both internal and external. In its internal form, a person tries to deny its own self. In its external form, the person sees his despairing condition as taking root in outside influences that he can blame for his despairing self. Basically, with the conscious despair, a person is “not willing to attire himself in himself, nor to see his task in the self given him (…) he wills to construct it himself” (73). In his defiance of his own self he becomes a king without a country. It is possible to live such a life, a life in defiance of your own self, and Kierkegaard even suggests a link between worldliness and this defiance:

“What is called worldliness is made up of just such men, who (if one may use the expression) pawn themselves to the world. They use their talents, accumulate money, carry on worldly affairs, calculate shrewdly, etc., etc., are perhaps mentioned in history, but themselves they are not; spiritually understood, they have no self, no self for whose sake they could venture everything, no self before God” (35)

Of course, it is natural to assume that if defiance of your despairing self can make you a worldly man, then it can also be too much of a burden to bear, one that will suffocate you and eventually kill you. It takes a strong man to continuously and knowingly defy his own self without breaking under the despair that arises from this.

At last, the despairing self does not only take its form in dichotomies. It is also of particular interest to speak of the conscience, of having a moral self, in regards to the despairing self. A conscience is atestament to the fact that your self is in a relationship with itself. It is your perception of yourself that is brought into question when you have to make a choice or decision.In this case, Kierkegaard speaks of narrowness and meanness of the mind as being examples of having lost one’s self or of defying it (33). Narrowness and meanness of the mind can be translated into a question of conscience and a lack thereof. If you act meanly and think narrowly, it is likely that you do not care to treat other people justly and that you do not see anything wrong with your treatment of others, even if this treatment goes against that of everyone else.

If we sum up, the most important point of Kierkegaard’s, the one which forms the foundation for our analysis of Faulkner’s works, is the point that the self is a work in progress. In order to become yourself, you must acknowledge what you are not. You must triumph over your despair at not being yourself – yet. If you are unable to do this or if you defy it, you will not have realized your own self, your identity, and you will remain a self in despair indefinitely.

Building onto Kierkegaard’s understanding of the self with Jean-Paul Sartre’s theories of freedom, choice and the other, we can seek to further understand the despairing self and how the human condition is greatly affected by the human mind itself.

* 1. **Jean-Paul Sartre – The Look and the Other**

Whereas Kierkegaard is considered one of the founders of existentialism, it was around the time of Jean-Paul Sartre and his colleagues that the philosophy was properly coined with his text *Existentialism and Humanism* (1946).

For Sartre, existentialism harbors crucial concepts such as freedom, choice and the Other. These concepts are all related to the self. They are all crucial to our later analysis of Faulkner’s works and Southern identity. Sartre addresses these concepts in *Being and Nothingness: An Essay on Phenomenological Ontology* (1943), which is one of his most analyzed works of existentialism. In this, he explains how freedom is an often used term, but not one easily defined. He understands freedom as connected to the lack of a human essence:

“Human freedom precedes essence in man and makes it possible; the essence of the human being is suspended in his freedom (…) Man does not exist first in order to be free *subsequently;* there is no difference between the being of man and his being-free” (25).

Human beings do not inherently possess essence. By essence is meant that human beings do not start out with a predefined self. Sartre, in accordance with Kierkegaard, believes that essence is created through lived experiences. However, since humans do not have a predefined self, and therefore a predefined way of acting, they also have no constraints. This is where Sartre introduces freedom and choice as important concepts of existentialism. Of choice in particular he says that “what we should observe first is that an action is on principle intentional” (433). We make choices in life. These choices define who we become and how we see ourselves. They define our position in life. We are free to make these choices, because there is no defined self from the beginning. This is where Sartre truly embodies existentialism, perhaps more so than Kierkegaard, with his focus on choice and freedom as laying the primary groundwork for the development of one’s self. When you make a choice, you also “un-make” another choice. By selecting something, you automatically deselect something else. One choice makes another choice impossible. So, by making a choice based in your complete freedom, you also restrict your freedom: “But to be precise, freedom can exist only as restricted since freedom is choice. Every choice, as we shall see, supposes elimination and selection; every choice is a choice of finitude” (495).

However, while Sartre says that freedom is restricted to choice, he nonetheless suggests that there is a way to make your freedom less restricted. This is done by accepting your facticity: “freedom can be truly free only by constituting facticity as its own restriction” (495). Sartre defines facticity as facts about the self such as where a person was born, their gender, their race, their place in society and so on (489). Choices are thus regulated by the facticity, the facts, surrounding each individual human being, either because they are making choices according to their facticity or because they are making choices against their facticity. Therefore, humans are still free despite their facticity as they are free to decide whether to follow their facticity or to go against it. Moreover, humans are free to interpret what they understand by their facticity, for example how they understand being a woman or a Negro. Thus, although facticity can be seen to restrict our freedom in choices, facticity also paradoxically creates a multitude of choices.

Regarding facticity, Sartre also introduces the Other. He says: “It is my place, my body, my past, my *position* in so far as it is already determined by the indications of Others, finally my fundamental *relation* to *the* Other” (489). In this sense, facticity is also created as a result of one’s relation to the Other, that is to another person looking at you from afar as humans need this connection to be able to see themselves. According to Sartre, the Other is a negation from one’s self. This means that the Other is seen in relation to oneself, where the Other is not the same as oneself:

“At the origin of the problem of the existence of others, there is a fundamental presupposition: others are the Other, that is the self which is not myself. Therefore we grasp here a negation as the constitutive structure of the being-of-others” (230).

The Other is recognized by what it is not in comparison to yourself. Thus if you are a man, then the other can be recognized by being or not being a man. If you are white, the other can be recognized by whether it is white or not. Hence, the facticity of oneself and the facticity of the Other becomes all important when negating yourself to the Other. The Other then becomes a negation of oneself, as the Other is recognized by what it is not compared to oneself.

The Other is also the one who makes you aware of yourself. This is where Sartre’s concept of the Look comes into play. A person can be alone and can be in the process of an action, but because they are alone, they do not see themselves in the process of the action. However, if another person comes along and sees you in the process of the action, and you become aware of them seeing you in the process of the action, then you yourself become aware of doing the action. Sartre’s concept of the Look is thus the process of becoming aware of your own actions and your own person through the Look of the Other. Sartre connects the Look to shame as he provides an example of how the look can lead to shame:

“I have just made an awkward or vulgar gesture. This gesture clings to me; I neither judge it nor blame it. I simply live it. I realize it in the mode of for-itself [viewing your self from outside]. But now suddenly I raise my head. Somebody was there and has seen me. Suddenly I realize the vulgarity of my gesture, and I am ashamed” (221).

Before the introduction of the Other into the act of the awkward/vulgar gesture, there was no self-awareness and therefore no shame. But when you become aware of the look of the Other, then you realize how you must appear to the Other. In short: “(…) the Other is the indispensable mediator between myself and me. I am ashamed of myself as I appear to the Other” (222). Through the look of the other, you pass judgment on yourself. This judgment of oneself then leads to shame. Through Sartre’s explanation of the connection between the look and shame, it also becomes evident how important the Other is to one’s notion of oneself. Without the look of the Other, humans would not be able “to realize fully all the structures of my being” (222). The Other is necessary in order for a human to be able to fully see and understand itself and its own actions.

The primary point to remember for our analysis of Faulkner’s novels is Sartre’s idea of the Other in regards to choice and facticity. You cannot make choices without your facticity, your sex or race, moderating your choices. At the same time, you will define yourself through the Other, more specifically through what you lack in comparison to the Other. The Other is defined as a being opposed to your own self, introducing Sartre’s Look. If you are in the middle of an action and feel the Look of the Other upon you, then through your new-found self-awareness shame will arise as a cause of the Other’s look upon you.

1. **Discriminatory Social Conditions in Faulkner’s Novels**

Our analysis will focus on the southern identity and how the sins of the fathers, rooted in discriminatory social conditions such as racism, classism and sexism, have played into the shaping of the southern identity in Faulkner’s novels. The southern identity is in conflict. The collective identity suppresses the individual identity, creating despair in the individual. This suppression takes its form in an internalized guilt that makes it difficult for the overall populace to step outside of their comfort zones and make choices that can possibly change the stigmatized and dichotomized social structure of the southern society. As such, since the southern individual is unable to make choices free of this dichotomy, a process of Othering takes place in which the individual is unable to triumph over its despair of not being itself. It is unable to realize its own identity, and therefore the individual will remain in despair indefinitely. This is what we will argue that Faulkner’s characters in Yoknapatawpha County suffer under, namely despair over being denied their identity as a result of the dichotomized social structure of the South, a paradoxical structure that is as unyielding as it is penitent. Our primary literature consists of *Flags in the Dust* (2012), *As I Lay Dying* (2004), *Light in August* (2005),and *Absalom, Absalom* (2005). *The Sound and the Fury* (1995) will be referenced as secondary literature only. Our method of approach will be a textual analysis of these novels that focuses on the themes of racism, classism and sexism.

* 1. **Racism and the Other**

In addition to the theories of Kierkegaard and Sartre, it is of relevance to speak of a theory that relates directly to racism and which works as an extension of Kierkegaard’s and Sartre’s existentialist theories on identity. This will be W. E. B Du Bois’ theory of double consciousness. In his American text *The Souls of Black Folk* from 1903 (2012) his theorysupposes that:

“The negro is born with a veil, and gifted with second sight in this American world – a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world (…) This double consciousness, this sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others” (405)

Here, we see similarities between Du Bois and Sartre’s theory of the Look. Du Bois expands on the theory by postulating that in the case of the African-American the goal is not to lose one or the other, or to merge into a third, but the goal is to be integrated as you are: “He [the negro] simply wishes to make it possible for a man to be both a Negro and an American, without being cursed and spit on by his fellows, without having the doors of opportunity shut in his face” (406). Faulkner’s characters, those that struggle with their racial identity, pose great examples of this double consciousness. Put differently, Faulkner’s characters are selves in despair as a consequence of the Look imposed upon them and the double consciousness that arises from this. This we shall see analyzed in the upcoming chapters.

* + 1. **Racism in *Light in August* (2005)– Joe Christmas**

In *Light in August,* the character of Joe Christmas arguably poses the most interesting figure when it comes to a racial identity in despair and Du Bois’ double consciousness. It is not obvious from outside appearances that Christmas is part Negro. Rarely anybody suspects him to be part Negro except for those he tells it to and those who find his behavior peculiar and blames it on non-white blood. In fact, his colleagues at the Jefferson planing mill suspect that he is part foreigner rather than Negro based on his unorthodox name and his appearance (1932, 27). Eventually, when it becomes public belief that Christmas is part Negro, the people appear to be more appalled by what they believe to be Christmas’ “white-man-lies” rather than his supposed Negro blood itself, once again emphasizing how Christmas’ outward appearance hints towards white blood primarily (263).

It is of importance to note, however, that Faulkner never offers any direct proof that Christmas has one Negro parent. We learn from Christmas’ past that he has experienced numerous incidents throughout his life in which people frame him as Negro despite any proof of it. These incidents attribute to Christmas’ despairing self in the sense that he, as a result of the conditioning around him, comes to doubt his outwardly white ancestry and begins to think of himself as Negro. His despair is therefore of the conscious sort, the sort where Christmas himself is aware that he is in despair, given that he repeatedly refers to himself as caught between his white and black blood. One incident in particular comes to mind in which Christmas refers to himself as being hunted by white men into the black abyss: “It seemed to him that he could see himself being hunted by white men at last into the black abyss which had been waiting, trying, for thirty years to drown him and into which now and at last he had actually entered” (249). Christmas also refers to his blood as having a life of its own, as “talking and talking” (89).

It must be explained that Christmas’ Negro identity is not actually an identity born from his own convictions, but rather born from outside influences that Christmas have come to accept as his own convictions. As such, when Christmas eventually accepts his Negro identity, it does not remove his despair. He remains in despair since he has accepted an identity imposed upon him. This leaves us with an individual who turns homicidal instead of peaceful. As Christmas himself says: “Though during the last seven days he has had no paved street, yet he has traveled further than in all the thirty years before” (255). By leaving the paved street, Christmas manages to travel further than ever before. This tells us that Christmas has managed to accept his identity after his murder of Mrs. Burden. So, to reiterate, since the Negro identity is one that has been imposed upon him, it means that Christmas’ acceptance thereof makes no change in the despair that he feels. Instead, his acceptance leaves him homicidal.

Christmas’ murder of Mrs. Burden, perhaps, plays into the overall prejudice that the Negro is primitive and vindictive, emphasizing the divide and the dichotomy between the black populace and the white populace in Jefferson. By accepting the Negro identity imposed upon him by outside influences throughout his entire life, Christmas plays into the stereotype of the Negro as dangerous and primitive. This is further emphasized by Christmas himself and the way that he consistently pseudo-sexualizes the female gender. To mention a couple of examples: “womanshenegro” (119), “pinkfoamed” (93) and “pinkwomansmelling” (93).

People throughout his life have influenced how Christmas views his ancestry, and they have ultimately attributed to Christmas’ conscious despair and his conviction that he has Negro blood. The list is long and stretches all the way back from a three-year old orphaned Christmas to an adult Christmas with Mrs. Burden as his lover.

During his time as an orphan, Christmas has trouble with the assigned dietitian and the janitor (his grandfather) at the orphanage. He accidentally observes a tryst between the dietitian and another man inside the dietitian’s office. Unfortunately, he is discovered doing so. The dietitian fears that he will tell on her, ruining her reputation and job, and so she tries to get rid of him. She chooses to frame him as Negro in order to do so, calling him a nigger bastard among more. She also tells the matron of the orphanage that the other children have been calling Christmas nigger for years, seeing something in him that the adults themselves had been foolish not to see right from the start (102).

Before Christmas was orphaned, he lived with his grandparents. His mother had died and his father was absent. He was deliberately put by his grandfather upon the doorsteps of the orphanage to be found and picked up. His grandfather was persistent that Christmas was part Negro, this in spite of how Christmas’ mother insisted that his father was Mexican (283). His grandfather becomes the janitor at the orphanage to watch over Christmas. Christmas thinks “he hates me and fears me. So much that he cannot let me out of his sight (…) That’s why I am different from others: because he is watching me all the time” (105). This is a direct parallel to Sartre’s theory of the Look. Christmas is made to feel different, to feel Negro, because of his grandfather’s look upon him. The grandfather, Doc Hines or Eupheus, also travels from Mottstown and tries to have an adult Christmas lynched when he hears of him having killed Mrs. Burden in Jefferson, claiming that he has a right to kill the nigger (264). It seems that he is still unable after all those years to ignore Christmas’ disreputable ancestry which goes against what the grandfather believes to be the will of God, namely that miscegenation is a sin and that black folk are sinners by birth.

As a fourteen year old boy in his adoptive McEachern household, Christmas is faced for the first time with rape. Four of Christmas’ friends have arranged it. They wait for a Negro girl to walk into a sawmill shed, after which they draw straws for turns with her. It is unclear whether it is rape or whether the girl has agreed to the arrangement with monetary compensation or otherwise. Nevertheless, the situation has undertones of rape. Christmas comes into the shed as the last boy, “smelling the woman, smelling the Negro” (119). Looking into the Negro girl’s eyes, “he seemed to look down into a black well and at the bottom saw glints like reflection of dead stars” (119). Christmas sees himself, his Negro blood, reflected in the girl’s eyes. Instead of raping her like the other white boys have done, he ends up kicking and beating her, fearing their shared Negro blood more than he desires her female sex.

The first time that Christmas vocally identifies himself as part Negro is in his relationship to the waitress Bobbie during his adolescent years at the McEachern household. After taking her to bed, he tells her that he believes he has nigger blood in him. She refuses to believe he is part Negro, insisting he is a foreigner (148). Christmas’ relationship with Bobbie backfires when he brings her to a dance in which Mr. McEachern shows up and calls her Jezebel and a harlot. Christmas rushes Bobbie home, wanting her safe, and strikes his adoptive dad with a chair at the dance, knocking him out cold. When he later travels to Bobbie’s place to run away with her, he is stricken to find that she wants nothing to do with him and his nigger blood, calling him a “nigger son of a bitch” (164). Since Bobbie was the first person that Christmas identified himself as Negro to, it is natural to assume that his trust in women is forever squandered after this breach in trust and that he learns to internalize his despair over his mixed blood after this incident, minimalizing his chances of ever overcoming that despair if he does not dare speak of it to other people and can therefore not process it properly.

Mrs. Burden is a parallel to Bobbie. She arrives in Christmas’ adult life when Christmas is truly fed up with his mixed blood predicament. Mrs. Burden instigates a sexual relationship with Christmas. This is a relationship that, for her, appears to have more value than for Christmas. She is a Yankee and thus qualifies as a “Negro lover”. This is seen through her sympathy for the Negro race. She helps the Negro women of Jefferson and writes letter campaigns for Negro schools. She sees a rescue case in Christmas. She sees a black man who acts like a white man. As a supporter of Negro rights, she wants him to accept his Negro identity by applying for a Negro lawyer school (208). At the same time that she supports his Negro blood, however, she also plays into the Negro stereotype of the virile black male and thereby undermines his Negro blood as being something solely sexual and without higher value, especially when she lies about her impregnation (209).

Mrs. Burden’s two-faced treatment of Christmas contributes greatly to her role as Christmas’ primary Look-giver. That is to say, she is the personification of Sartre’s Look to Christmas. She is the person that in Christmas’ life provides the strongest Look. This is a valid argument when you consider that she is the person who makes Christmas snap in the end. She is the person that he kills, not Joe Brown who also knows of Christmas’ mixed blood. This is because Mrs. Burden confronts Christmas with the strongest Look. Christmas realizes that it is futile to keep despairing over his mixed blood and that he needs to accept it fully. Basically, he chooses black blood over white blood, annihilating his mixed blood heritage which had done him no good in life so far. Mrs. Burden’s look confirms him as Negro rather than white, and it is her confirmation that makes Christmas chose Negro over white. Yet, even though he accepts his Negro blood at last, it offers him no comfort. It does not alleviate his despair because his Negro blood is something that people throughout his life has convinced him that he has. As such, when he realizes that accepting his supposed Negro blood won’t help him anymore than his mixed blood did, he kills Mrs. Burden who besets all of the Looks throughout Christmas’ life that have Negro-fied him, adding her own twist to the situation by suggesting that they commit suicide together as two marginalized Others, the Yankee and the Miscegenation.

It is noteworthy that it is primarily women who accept Christmas without questioning his ancestry. Christmas’ identity is largely shaped by the women in his life, be that through bad or good experiences. We can mention his biological grandmother who was the first person to show compassion towards Christmas in the face of the wrath of his grandfather. The same can be said for Mrs. Eachern, his adoptive mother, who showed him compassion in the face of Mr. Eachern’s brutality. Likewise, we have Bobbie and Mrs. Burden who were grand contributors to Christmas’ racial sense of self in a much negative way. This may boil down to sympathy and how the female sex is often the most emphatic one and can thus relate better to Christmas’ racial despair. However, the women may also see Christmas’ despair reflected in their own lives. They are all marginalized Others in the face of the white male patriarch. Considering this, it doesn’t seem farfetched to say that the female populace shares a systematic oppression with Christmas that makes them accept his Negro blood, hoping that he is willing to accept their female blood in return since they know that no white male will ever do so. The only case in which Christmas accepts the female blood is with Bobbie. He never accepted Mrs. Eachern’s compassion (128) and neither does he accept Mrs. Burden’s attempt at a romantic relationship.

Lastly, as an ending note to the puzzle that is Joe Christmas’ identity, Christmas’ conscious despair is largely representative of Du Bois’ double-consciousness. Stigmatized as a Negro from birth in spite of his white appearance, Christmas is born into an American world that yields him no true self-consciousness and only lets him understand himself through the eyes of others. This is resonant of Sartre’s Look, but Du Bois also adds that the goal is not to lose one or the other part of your identity, or even to merge into a third identity, but the goal is to be integrated as you are. The negro “wishes to make it possible for a man to be both a Negro and an American, without being cursed and spit on by his fellows, without having the doors of opportunity shut in his face” (Calhoun, 2012, 406). This is what Christmas wishes for, yet what he is unable to achieve. No choice he makes, no action he does, has any effect on his fellow townsfolk’s perception of his mixed blood as something to be spat upon, and so he remains shaped by the world, shaped by the American veil of double-consciousness, and cut off from the opportunity to escape his racial despair and live an ideal life in which his mixed blood is accepted and makes him equal with his fellow countrymen instead of a marginalized Other in a social dichotomy that is impossible to change.

* + 1. **Racism in *Absalom, Absalom* (2005)– The Bon-Sutpen Family**

For *Absalom, Absalom*, the Bon-Sutpen family is the most relevant to speak of in regards to racism and the despairing individual. Charles Etienne De Saint Velery Bon, Charles Bon’s son, provides a mirror image to Joe Christmas. His despair is also of the conscious sort, although he does not fight his Negro blood like Christmas. He rather plays the victim to it, acting “complacent beneath his first father’s curse” (200). This is the curse of miscegenation, and it is a curse that leads its victims to suffer from a double-consciousness imposed upon them through the Looks of the people around them.

Charles Etienne is first brought into the Sutpen family through the honor killing of his father Charles Bon at the hands of Henry Sutpen. Clytie, the illegitimate Negro daughter and housemaid of Thomas Sutpen, raises Charles Etienne Bon at the Sutpen plantation after the deaths of both his father and mother, the octoroon mistress with whom Charles Bon conceived Charles Etienne Bon (201). Charles Etienne Bon turns out a despairing identity as a result of his mixed blood heritage. He was born in a brothel to his octoroon mother. That environment, as opposed to the Sutpen plantation, was a vastly different place where “pigmentation had no more moral value than the silk walls” (199). It is reasonable to assume that Charles’ movement from that environment to the Sutpen environment had a strong effect of his sense of racial self, his mixed blood. This becomes visible already in his early stay at the Sutpen plantation, particularly in two instances. On the first night that he is brought to the plantation, he sleeps in between Judith on the bed and Clytie on the floor, thinking of the two women and himself that “you are not here in this bed with me, where through no fault of your own nor willing of your own you should be, and you are not down here on this pallet floor with me, where through no fault nor willing of your own you must and will be” (198). He is suspended between Judith on the bed and Clytie on the floor, between white and black. A second instance occurs when he is fourteen and Clytie finds a broken mirror underneath his mattress, saying “who to know what hours of amazed and tearless grief he might have spent before it” (199).

As an adult, Charles Etienne gambles Negroes and ends up in street fights. His bad behavior escalates until he is dragged to court over disorderly conduct after which he leaves Jefferson behind (209). He returns one year later, now with a “coal black and ape-like woman and an authentic wedding license” (205). The Negress wife is a testament to Charles Etienne’s racial despair and the double-consciousness that he suffers from. Charles only has a faint tinge of pigmentation to his skin and as such he could have chosen a white wife if he so pleased. The fact that he upon his return to Jefferson flings his marriage license in the face of Judith “with something of that invincible despair with which he had the Negroes in the dice game” (205) further emphasizes this.

Clytie is a less obvious example of racial despair compared to the other characters in *Absalom, Absalom*. Faulkner gives her less screen-time, but that does not make her less important. She is both a marginalized female and a marginalized Negro. Her despair is of the conscious sort, yet she is less resigned to it than Charles Etienne Bon. It doesn’t appear as such, but Clytie tries to overcome the dichotomy that has her stigmatized as a marginalized Other. She suffers under double-consciousness like the rest of the mixed blood characters in the novel, but while she upon first glance appears as the most passive sufferer, a lot of her actions in life show us that she is one of the least passive sufferers. She never succeeds in overcoming her double-consciousness and ridding herself of her despair, but she comes closer than most of the other characters. Unlike Joe Christmas and Charles Etienne Bon, she does not become scorned by the Jefferson public, meaning that she is able to process her despair more successfully than them, since she does not need to worry about persecution. Keeping to herself within the Sutpen mansion and being under the protection of Thomas Sutpen himself, she is subjected to less Othering Looks than what the other mixed blood characters are. She may also have more success at processing her despair because she is both a marginalized Negro, but also a marginalized female. As such, her despair has two origins, but instead of this emphasizing her despair, it seems to lessen her despair, splitting it up between two stations. Being split between two stations, one could argue that this makes it easier for Clytie to reach some sort of closure with her despair, yet without ever fully ridding herself of it. This closure argument is rooted in the fact that Clytie is one of the few persons that survives the Sutpen household into old age, not to mention that she is the one who puts an end to the household by burning down the mansion in a suicidal act, showing us exactly how active she can be in her despair. Yet, no matter how active, she never manages to fully conquer her despair. In Faulkner’s own interpretation, she reaches serenity, though she still shows despair:

“(…) and then for a moment maybe Clytie appeared in that window from which she must have been watching the gates constantly day and night for three months – the tragic gnome’s face beneath the clean headrag, against a red background of fire, seen for a moment between two swirls of smoke, looking down at them, perhaps not even now with triumph and no more despair than it had ever worn, possibly even serene above the melting clapboards before the smoke swirled across it again” (376)

We can mention other episodes aside from her symbolic burning of the Sutpen mansion in which Clytie lets her despair over her double-consciousness show. For example, Clytie insists upon referring to Rosa Coldfield as simply Rosa, something that a regular Negress maidservant would never have done, child of the plantation owner or not (138; 369). She does the same with Henry and Judith. This can be read as a passive-aggressive act of challenging her double-consciousness by challenging social decorum. Lastly, there is one episode with Charles Etienne Bon as a child, where she “(…) scrubbed him with harsh rags and soap, sometimes scrubbing at him with repressed fury as if she were trying to wash the smooth faint tinge from his skin” (198). This can be reflective of herself and how she despairs over her own mixed blood.

In chapter five of the novel, one that Rosa Coldfield narrates, Clytie’s despair is summed up as thus: “Clytie who in the very pigmentation of her flesh represented that debacle which had brought Judith and me to what we were and which had made her (Clytie) that which she declined to be” (156). Rosa says here that Clytie denies her Negro blood. This is a direct testament to how Clytie makes an active effort to conquer her despair and double-consciousness.

Jim Bond, Charles Etienne Bon’s son, makes a case for the unconscious despair. This we yet have to encounter in any of Faulkner’s characters. This is worth to note since Kierkegaard claims the unconscious despair to be the most common one, yet it is the one that is the rarest to find in those of Faulkner’s characters who suffer from mixed blood heritage. It would appear that the despair that arises from a double-consciousness is most often a conscious one, and this may be because it has its roots in racism and slavery. Racism relates back to the guilt-ridden problematic of slavery which carries strong mental connotations in the American conscience. Mental connotations that, say, are a lot more sensitive than in the case of sexism, given that race as a societal concept is newer than the concept of gender and is thus more noticeable. Jim Bond makes a case for the rarer unconscious racial despair in the sense that he is portrayed as a mentally deficient individual, who doesn’t seem to be aware of social decorum in general, much less aware of the fact that his mixed blood has put him in a precarious social position: “(…) there stood in the hall below a hulking young light-colored negro man in clean faded overalls and shirt, his arms dangling, no surprise, no nothing in the saddle-covered and slack-mouthed idiot face” (370).

Sartre’s theory of the Look is particularly prevalent in the case of Charles Bon, though not in regards to the plot of the novel, but rather in regards to Faulkner’s narrative style and how he presents Bon’s mixed blood character. Faulkner has chosen not to give us Charles Bon’s voice. He has chosen to portray Charles Bon to the reader as seen through the eyes of others, especially through the interpretive eyes of Quentin and Shreve. In fact, Faulkner never tells the reader directly that Charles Bon has mixed blood. He infers it through the fact that Charles Bon’s mother was a Spaniard, according to her father, but that Thomas Sutpen left her when he learned that her family had withheld information from him that would have stopped him from entering the marriage: “(…) yet they deliberately withheld from me the one fact which I have reason to know that they were aware would have caused me to decline the entire matter (…) this new fact rendered it impossible that this woman and child be incorporated in my design [of a dynasty]” (264). There is no explicit proof that what prompted Sutpen to leave his wife was the fact that she was part Negro rather than Spaniard. What we get is Quentin’s and Shreve’s interpretation that this is the case. We get their understanding of the Bon-Sutpen downfall, their look on Charles Bon, during chapter eight in which they play-act an episode between Henry and Charles where Charles drops the Negro word: “He did not have to do this, Henry. He did not need to tell you that I am a nigger to stop me” (356). As such, since Bon is presented to us solely through the perspective of others, we cannot speak of him in regards to his despair and a possible double-consciousness since all the information that we have of him is second-hand information or third-hand interpretations. The racial dispute that makes up the basis of the *Absalom, Absalom* plot therefore exists through almost solely through the Look.

While the Negro is a subversive Other to the authority of the white male patriarch, we must also reverse this relationship and view the white male patriarch as an Other, though not a marginalized one. Sartre says that we are all Otherized through the Look. Likewise, Kierkegaard says we all must conquer our despair, not just the marginalized ones of us. This considered, we can look at Thomas Sutpen as an Otherized and despairing white male patriarch. The white male fears the black male in the sense that he fears the emasculation and the castration anxiety that the virile Negro stereotype poses, resulting in a process of Othering for both parties involved. Thomas Sutpen, however, is not afraid of the Negro in any sense of the word. He treats them like he treats all other people, with indifference and apathy. Growing up in the mountains without any Negro population to speak of has possibly rendered him untouched by the stereotype of the Negro as a predator. An example of his non-fear of Negroes would be his so-called wild Negroes that he brings with him from Haiti. They are labeled as wild by the Jefferson public because 1) they speak French, a language that is rare in Jefferson (36), 2) they initially arrived in Jefferson stark-naked and covered in mud (38), and 3) they act as bloodhounds for Sutpen, “driving the swamp like a pack of hounds” (37). The Jefferson public even fears them enough to turn them superstitious with the power to conjure more cotton per acre than other slaves (72). Sutpen, however, is unmoved by them. In fact, he arranges street fights with them on his property, joining the fighting himself (29).

Sutpen’s Othering is not found in the dichotomy between Negro and white, but rather in the relationship with his equals, meaning the white plantations owners and the Jefferson public in general. His apathetic nature and his disregard for all individuals regardless of race has Otherized him from his peers. He does not fit the paternalistic formula of the plantation owner as it has been explained in previous chapters. He does not stand as a regular white male patriarch. He is feared by his peers and thus Otherized by that fear through their Looks upon him. While Negroes are Otherized for their race, white males can be Otherized by their peers for not fitting into the pre-molded shape of the white male. The white male must fulfill the white male role in the dichotomy exactly like the Negro must fulfill his role. If not, he will be Otherized by his white peers.

Thomas Sutpen’s despair appears to be conscious. He seems to know of his despair in the sense that he seems to be defying it. We can derive this from the link that Kierkegaard claims there to be between worldliness and the defiance of one’s self. Sutpen is a worldly man. If we combine this with the fact that Sutpen seems to lack a conscience, he appears in defiance of his own self. As explained previously, Kierkegaard says that narrowness of the mind translates into the lack of a conscience and a lack of a conscience can translate into defiance of one’s self. Sutpen’s general apathy towards other people is reminiscent of a faulty and absent conscience since he does not see anything wrong with his unjust treatment of others.

The Othering of the white male as in the case of Thomas Sutpen leads us to the question of “white” racism, or classism, which is equally apparent in Faulkner’s novels. In *Absalom, Absalom*, we find it the most apparent in the case of Wash Jones, the handyman and squatter on Sutpen’s property. Wash Jones is “white trash” (181). In the time around the Civil War, white trash families share many of the same discriminatory social conditions as Negroes. They are both economically and intellectually challenged, and they are less respected by other groups in the social hierarchy, being seen as servants rather than equals. In the case of Wash Jones, he is only allowed to squat on Sutpen’s land because he offers maintenance services in return. He lives alone with his granddaughter in an abandoned fishing camp on Sutpen’s property. He has no job because he does not qualify for any. He thus has no money to pay rent with. He speaks without correct grammar and a “white trash” dialect, for examples by how he pronounces “Colonel” as “Kernel” (186).

If women and Negroes make up marginalized Others based on how they are unable to affect the discriminatory social conditions that marginalize and oppress them, we can likewise call poor white males for marginalized Others, though perhaps to a lesser degree than the other two groups as a result of their white male genealogy and the inherent authority that lies in this. Perhaps it would be more succinct to talk of classism in the case of the poor white male. Classism is the white man’s racism against the white man, and this is what we will analyze in the next two novels.

* + 1. **Classism in *As I Lay Dying* (2004)– Anse Bundren**

Classism, just like racism, creates a process of Othering and despair in the individuals that are victim to it. Classism is the white man’s racism against the white man. Kierkegaard says that we are all in despair regardless of race and regardless of class. This cannot be seen more clearly than in the case of *As I Lay Dying.* Here, we are not dealing with a wealthy white male patriarch such as Thomas Sutpen who is Otherized by his plantation-owning peers for not fitting into his role in the dichotomy of the South. Instead, we are dealing with a poor white male who is Otherized through the classism and elitism that is inherent in Southern society.

In the novel, we follow the Bundren family, a family that is as white as it is poor. They may not be considered white trash, given that they hold property of their own, but they are perceived by their fellow white people as greedy and burdensome loafers. The loafing shows in how Anse Bundren, the provider of the family, has never had a shirt with sweat stains on it, claiming that if he gets overheated from working in the field it will endanger his life. Likewise, the greediness shows through Anse’s general attitude towards money and his unwillingness to pay for anything that is not strictly necessary (30). Cora Tull, a friend of the family, sums up the Bundren family as such: “A Bundren through and through, loving nobody, caring for nothing except for how to get something with the least amount of work” (17). The process of classism and Othering that the Bundren family has gone through in their lives has made them put up a front to survive, making their fellow people see them as a cold and overly proud family that does not have any pride left in the eyes of others. In the words of Samson: “I be durn if he didn’t act like he was proud of it, like he had made the river rise himself” (101). Anse himself says that he will be beholden to no man, indicating that he may or may not be aware of this pride himself (16).

The otherness and despair that classism creates in an individual is seen clearest through Anse Bundren, including how the people around Anse perceives and judges him as the provider of the family, the one with the responsibility for his family’s welfare. Anse falls short in the eyes of his fellow folk, embodying how these folk consider themselves elitist to Anse himself. What underscores the classism in the case of Anse is that he has not been into town for 12 years (37), and that when he travels through the town of Mottson with the coffin of the decaying Addie Bundren, a fact that also strongly underscores Anse’s poor upbringing for treating the body of his wife so badly regardless of her personal wishes, it becomes obvious what the townsfolk think of Anse through their relief that Anse and his family is gone as soon as they showed up, especially with that coffin in tow (193). Anse’s poor white upbringing is furthermore emphasized by how he chooses to pour cement of his son’s, Cash’s, broken leg in order to steady it for the remainder of the travel to Jefferson, this in spite of how he is advised by the townsfolk not to do so. Anse’s country dialect also reflects his upbringing, just as in the case with Wash Jones in *Absalom, Absalom*. Perhaps the most hard-hitting assessment of Anse is Doctor Peabody’s. Of Anse’s poor intelligence and general ineptitude as indicative of his upbringing, Doctor Peabody tells Anse’s children to “then you all could have stuck his head into the saw and cured a whole family” (228). Vernon Tull, the wealthier neighbor of the Bundren’s, is the only character in the novel that seems to appreciate Anse by saying that he has “bore himself this long” and can thus not be as less of a man as people say of him (66). Yet Tull also acknowledges that the only burden Anse has ever carried in his life is the burden of himself, indicating that Tull may be aware of Anse’s societal shortcomings, even though Tull appreciates him the way he is.

Anse’s despair is, in all likelihood, a conscious one, although it is hard to tell, since Faulkner gives us little of Anse’s perspective in *As I Lay Dying*, dedicating only three out of fifty-nine chapters to Anse. Otherwise, we learn of Anse almost solely through others and their presuppositions. Anse says on page 94 of the novel that “I got some regard for what folks say about my flesh and blood”, however he also says that he doesn’t care for what is said about his own person, but that he only cares how it reflects on the womenfolk of his family. Likewise, on page 98, he says:

“It’s a hard country on man; it’s hard (…) Nowhere in this sinful world can a honest, hard-working man profit. It takes them that runs the stores in the town, doing no sweating, living off of them that sweats. It ain’t the hard-working man, the farmer, Sometimes I wonder why we keep at it.”

Here, we can argue that Anse is aware of the classism that takes place in society, and he seems bitter and resentful over it, wondering why “we [the poor white people] keep at it”. Anse is conscious of the classism that occurs in society and appears to be resentful towards it, thus offering us the basis for the argument that Anse is aware of the despair that he feels. And yet, though he may be aware of it, he does not feel any inclination to change it. Such an act of initiative does not lie in his nature. Anse’s nature is not that of an initiator. Addie, his deceased wife, describes him as a tall bird hunched in the cold weather (158), and this is an apt description of both Anse’s looks and his attitude towards life. Being a religious individual and a docile man by nature, Anse prefers to live the life that was given him and wait for death to give him the equality that was not given to him in life: “I wonder why we keep at it. It’s because there is a reward for us above (…) Every man will be equal there and it will be taken from them that have and give to them that have not by the Lord” (98). Through Anse’s lack of initiative, he seems more inclined to consciously ignore his despair, trusting the hand of God to make things right in death. Just like Thomas Sutpen in *Absalom, Absalom*, Anse does not seem to want to overcome his despair at not being himself. He does not do this in the way of Thomas Sutpen, who is aware of his despair and consciously defies it. Instead, Anse seems willing to stay in despair, Otherized through classism, trusting in God to make his despair right after death. This marks him as one of the more subtly tragic characters in Faulkner’s novels. A lack of will to change one’s circumstances beyond what by happenstance falls into one’s lap almost appears more tragic than the strong will to change one’s circumstances and overcome one’s despair. The strong will turns destructive, as in the case with Joe Christmas, but the lackluster will sits and simmers. It provides no end to the despair, no death, no climax, no destruction.

* + 1. **Classism in *Flags in the Dust* (2012) – The Snopeses and the MacCallums**

In *Flags in the Dust* (2012), classism also comes into play, this in the case of the Snopes family and the MacCallum family. Here, we are dealing with families that come from the Upland South in the words of Charles Aiken. These families originate from the poorer part of Yoknapatawpha County, the Pine Hills, which is in the south-east where the soil is poorest and provides its inhabitants, mainly yeoman farmers, with little possibilities of gaining riches like those of the wealthier plantation owners with their nutritious north-west soil. The MacCallums also represent what Aiken calls a mountaineer culture through their clannish behavior and lifestyle. This is a culture that originates from the Appalachian Mountains in the South-East of the US and where Faulkner has copied this into his fictional Yoknapatawpha County through the MacCallum family and Thomas Sutpen.

In terms of Kierkegaardian despair, the Snopeses appear to suffer most from this, while the MacCallums suffers the least, if any at all. Given their isolated lifestyle far away from Jefferson in what seems to be a forested area where little traffic ever passes by (359), the MacCallums are subjected less to the judgment and prejudices of others in comparison to the members of the Snopeses who have settled in Jefferson and are judged by the Jefferson townsfolk with every step they take. This difference in lifestyle means that the MacCallums are less Otherized than the Snopeses and feel less despair because of this.

Byron Snopes, the bookkeeper in Old Bayard’s bank, is the primary example of the Snopes family that Faulkner provides us with in *Flags in the Dust*. Faulkner’s example is that of strong classism. Byron Snopes speaks in country idiom (102), and he is described as silent with covert close eyes and a nasal and slow voice (78). These character traits are associated with people that are far removed from a position of power and prestige. Byron is not white trash. He can read and has a steady job at a bank. He is, however, asocial and insecure in behavior. This is proved by his secret infatuation with Narcissa Benbow and his love letters that border on nearly fanatic in nature. This fact adds to his estrangement from his white peers, which causes them to Otherize him. They see him as being of lesser value than themselves. One of the reasons for this is Byron’s choice of residence. He lives in the Beard hotel, a boarding house with a poor reputation: “Men only patronize the Beard hotel; countrymen in town overnight during court or the holiday season or arrested perhaps by inclement weather, stop there (…) here, in the company of other bachelors – clerks, mechanics and such – the book-keeper Snopes lives” (105).

It is clear from several incidents that occur within the novel that the Jefferson townsfolk do not look upon Byron Snopes, or any Snopes, with fondness. The Snopes family in its entirety is described as parasitic and as disliked by the Jefferson townsfolk, a fact which would inflict great despair on the individual Snopes members that are subjected to this generalization of their family without having any chance of conquering their individual identity in the face of this generalization:

“(…) a seemingly inexhaustible family which for the last ten years had been moving to town in driblets from a small settlement known as Frenchman’s Bend. Flem, the first Snopes, had appeared unheralded one day behind a counter of a small restaurant on a side street, patronized by country folk. With this foothold and like Abraham of Old, he brought his blood and legal kin household by household, individual by individual, into town and established themselves where they could gain money (…) [The restaurant] served as an alighting place for incoming Snopeses from which they spread to small third-rate businesses of various kinds (…) where they multiplied and flourished. The older residents, from their Jeffersonian houses and genteel stores and offices, looked on with amusement at first. But this was long since become something like consternation” (167)

This is Sartre’s look at play and it is emphasized on the following page of the novel in a conversation between Horace Benbow and Aunt Sally. When Aunt Sally asks Horace if he brought “his Snopes” back with him from the war, he answers no and that he was right disappointed in him, too. To this, Aunt Sally answers that “anybody could have told you that when you left” (166), implying that no one has faith in the Snopes family and that no one is surprised that Byron Snopes disappointed Horace. Horace goes a step further by saying “it’s individuals like that, parasites” before he is cut off by Aunt Sally (167). This dialogue exemplifies the kind of Look that the Snopes family is subjected to, a Look that is sure to induce despair in its negativity.

Byron directly addresses his despair over the classist society that he lives in on page 269 of the novel. This happens when he is greatly jealous of young Bayard Sartoris for having married Narcissa Benbow, the woman that Byron is unhealthily obsessed with and writes secret love letters to: “and young Sartoris, at that: a man whom he had hated instinctively with all his sense of inferiority and all the venom of his worm-like nature” (269). Here, Snopes directly labels himself as inferior, implying that the town of Jefferson is classist and that he himself lies on the inferior end of that spectrum, feeling great hate towards Bayard Sartoris because he is superior to him. His hate shows us that he feels despair over his inferiority.

Compared to the infamous Snopes family, the MacCallum family is subjected to a lot less prejudice and therefore suffers from lesser despair. This may be a consequence of their isolated lifestyle where they meet little people outside of their own family, but it should also not be forgotten that while the MacCallum family is white and seems relatively poor, they nevertheless hold property of their own and maintain their household by being huntsmen. All white and poor families are not the same. There should always be made a distinction between these families. There are tenant farmers, there are yeoman farmers, there are huntsmen etc. There are different prejudices attached to each type of family, different Looks and different conditions for despair. Unlike Byron Snopes, the MacCallum family seems relatively well-liked by Jefferson folk. This may be because they have not tried to climb the socioeconomic ladder like the Snopeses, posing no threat to Jefferson, and because of their hugely independent lifestyle that differentiates them from the “parasitic” Snopeses. The fact that the MacCallums are great friends of the prestigious Sartoris family also tells us that they are viewed with less consternation than the Snopeses. Young Bayard and John Sartoris used to hunt with the MacCallums on their property back in the day (122), and Bayard flees to the MacCallum household after his grandfather’s death, seeking to alleviate his guilt among friends that are not privy to the gossip mill of Jefferson and therefore have not yet heard of Old Bayard Sartoris’ death and cannot fault young Bayard for it. Rafe MacCallum also seems to be held in great regard by young Bayard Sartoris, as shown when Bayard gets drunk and he allows Rafe to manhandle him and steer him away from a foolish argument that would have ended in a fight otherwise (125-126).

However, as equal as the MacCallums may seem to the prestigious Sartoris family, there are still factors that label them as socially inept and inferior like the Snopeses. One of these factors is their moonshine whiskey, or demijohn (120), which is not considered a prestigious endeavor. Likewise, Jackson MacCallum has bred a hound with a fox, trying to make hunting dogs out of the litter (348). This is also not a particularly prestigious endeavor. In fact, we know that a fox and a dog can’t produce offspring, and it makes you wonder whether Faulkner himself was aware of this and intentionally used it to make us perceive the MacCallums as unintelligent and primitive. This is likely the case.

While they are not subjected to classism like the poorer Snopeses and the MacCallums, the prestigious Sartoris family tells us how important ancestry is in Yoknapatawpha County, and they do this through the cedar chest up in the attic which holds family heirlooms such as a cavalry sable, a Confederate uniform and a rapier. Most significantly, however, the chest holds a book in which all the deaths of the Sartoris family members are written down in chronological order, showing us how heritage has always been an indicator of social station and elitism in southern society (87).

Although classism is the bigger thematic in *Flags in the Dust,* possibly a consequence of the main characters who are mostly white, racism is also a recurring theme in the novel. Slavery was abolished long before World War I, the time during which *Flags in the Dust* unfold, but racist thoughts were still prominent within southern society and slavery would continue illegally for decades after its official abolishment. As such, we find racism present in *Flags in the Dust,* although it takes its shape from minor characters and minor incidents throughout the novel. It does not take center stage, but it is nonetheless still worthy of mention. It shows us how Faulkner understood racist thought to have survived from the antebellum era into the modern era, possibly also showing us how Faulkner understood racism as infinite, as something with the ability to endure social change for the worse rather than the better.

In *Flags in the Dust*, racist thought is found in minor incidents such as on page 127 where a horse trader calls a Negro for nigger and says that there must be “some kin between a nigger and a animal, I always claim”. Likewise, on page 333, young Bayard Sartoris refers to a Negro by the way of Nigger, albeit in his thoughts and not out loud. Simon, the Negro servant of the Sartoris family, lends money to one of his friends, money that belonged to someone else, and when he compares this endeavor to Old Bayard’s banking business, he says to Old Bayard “you does de same thing ev’y day” (240) to which the white Bayard snorts violently.

Doctor Peabody is also interesting when speaking of racism. During a discussion at the Sartoris dinner table, Peabody is asked “how many [niggers] have you got?” to which he answers “I don’t rightly know (…) I got six or seven registered ones, but I don’t know how many scrubs I have” (303). This conversation shows the legacy of the slave trade, namely racism, and that this legacy has stretched far beyond the years in which slavery was still a legal institution.

While racism is indeed still present in the modern era, we nevertheless see a change in the choices and possibilities for Negroes in this decade. Negroes now have enough capital to own shops, which is a large step up from working on plantations (278). We also see a change in attitude from the southern Negroes themselves, a quiet uproar against the despair that they feel and their double consciousness. We see them starting to fight back against the Otherizing looks that they receive from society, especially after World War I after which the slow ascent of modernism began to take off properly. It is the younger Negroes that start to rebel against their despair at being perceived as inferior. They did not live through the Civil War and are therefore not afraid to start a new uproar. They did not see the horrors and repercussions of that war and are therefore not afraid of seeing it repeated. In *Flags in the Dust,* we see this change in attitude in Caspey, Simon’s grandson. When Old Bayard wants him to saddle a mare, he replies that “ain’t gwine skip it, big boy” (80). Old Bayard slaps him to ground in the face of his insolence. Simon tells his grandson that “I kep’ tellin’ you dem new-fangled war notions [WWI] of yo’n wa’nt gwine ter work on dis place (…) You go’n git dat mare, en save dat nigger freedom talk fer townfolks: dey mought stomach it. Whut us niggers want ter be free fer, anyhow?” (81). Here, we have the difference in attitude between young Caspey and old Simon. Old Simon does not actively want “nigger freedom”, but Caspey very much does.

* 1. **Sexism and the Other**

For the analysis of the theme of sexism, Simone de Beauvoir’s theory of the second sex will be used to complement Kierkegaard’s theory of the self in despair and Sartre’s theories of free choice and the Look.

Beauvoir worked closely with Sartre and expanded on his work in order to use it to examine the roles of women in society. In the past, men have been categorized as the norm in society and women as an Other. Beauvoir, on the other hand, adheres to the existentialist theorem that “existence precedes essence” (Reynolds, 2006, 140). She therefore states that “one is not born a woman, but rather becomes one” (140). By renouncing essentialism and supporting existentialism, Beauvoir also renounces the idea that women inhabit certain traits, such as being delicate and emotional, which she believes keeps women oppressed by confining them to specific social roles. However, existentialism also renounces the idea that women are defined as an Other as opposed to men through biology. Since the self is created through experiences, Otherness cannot stem from the biological sex, because biological sex is there from the beginning. Beauvoir believes that women are partly responsible for their own oppression, as they have not made the right choices to free themselves of patriarchal oppression (Reynolds, 2006). Beauvoir’s claim can here be linked to Sartre’s idea of facticity and choice. Women choose according to their facticity, namely that they are women and as such have a specific status in society as an Other. For women, choosing outside their role and against their facticity will stigmatize them. Being stigmatized as a disobedient Other will restrict their choices even more as they will be subjected to the Look. Through the Look, people, particularly men, will observe women and judge their actions. If women keep behaving outside their roles they will be further stigmatized and even ostracized. Women’s facticity limits their choices and keeps them oppressed which creates an evil circle. By being limited by their facticity and restricted in their choices, women will fall into Kierkegaardian despair because they can never achieve their true self.

Just as women are restricted by their facticity, so are men. Men however do not suffer from oppression by women. Instead they are limited in their choices by being the oppressor of this dichotomy. Men are supposed to be strong and assertive and thereby dominant to women. Choosing outside this role will stigmatize men and they will be regarded as weak. Through the Look men might be seen as an Other by stronger men if they show emotion. This can lead to despair as they cannot develop their true self.

Kierkegaard’s, Sartre’s and Beauvoir’s philosophies taken together all highlight the functions of oppression of women in society. Women have specific roles to play in society according to Beauvoir. The only way to escape these roles is by making the right choices. However, the inherent sexism in society limits their choices, and this creates despair as they cannot develop an authentic identity. In other words, just like with racism, Faulkner’s women are selves in despair as a consequence of the Look imposed upon them and the limited possibilities in life that arises from this. The following chapters will analyze this problem.

* + 1. **Sexism and Classism in *As I Lay Dying* (2004)– The Bundren Women**

In *As I Lay Dying,* the Bundren family is dealing with the loss of a woman, their mother, who was very important to their understanding of themselves as individuals and as a family. The novel is abundant with male voices through its polyvocalistic storytelling, but it is essentially male voices revolving around a woman and her status in the family. The representation of women through the voices of men is mirrored in *The Sound and the Fury* (1995) where Caddy’s life is told through the eyes of her brothers. Caddy can thus be argued to only exist through the Looks of the men around her. While Caddy never has the chance to tell her story, both Dewey Dell and Addie are given their own chapters.

*As I Lay Dying* is a novel which shows the roles of women in the South as marginalized Others and the despair that they feel from this. In this novel, the dichotomy between women and men is illustrated by a separation in the physical spaces that men and women inhabit. While Addie is dying, it is Dewey Dell who is in the room nursing her mother: “Dewey Dell still a-fanning her with the fan” (27). It is also Dewey Dell who inhabits the kitchen and cooks for the family on the behest of her father, Anse, right after Addie has died: ““I reckon you better get supper on,” he says. Dewey Dell does not move. “Git up, now, and put supper on,” pa says” (45). Even as Dewey Dell is in the midst of grieving, the expectation is still that she is going to fulfill her role and provide dinner for the family. As such Dewey Dell becomes an Other to the men of the family. This is one of the first examples given in the novel of how Dewey Dell’s facticity as a woman, how sexism, restricts her choices in life. This is also a pivotal moment of the novel, because the role of housekeeper, and in a sense mother, is transferred fully from Addie to Dewey Dell. It is safe to assume that Dewey Dell has already had the responsibility of the household while Addie was sick, but now that Addie has died, the responsibility is fully transferred to Dewey Dell. As the only daughter out of five children, she is the only person left to take over the role of housekeeper. Although the transference of role from mother to daughter seems uncomplicated, some resistance can be traced in Dewey Dell’s hesitation to go “put supper on” as she is ordered to do so. Dewey Dell is crying and mourning over her mother’s passing, but she has to be told twice before she accepts her new role and goes to put on supper. She is not choosing according to her own desires, but acceding to the expectations of those around her. She is denying her own self and as such she is in conscious despair. This expectation is envisioned by her brother Darl, when we hear the inner workings of his thoughts through the italics section at the end of his fifth chapter. He imagines what happens when Dewey Dell leaves the room after the episode mentioned above:

“She will go out where Peabody is, (…) he will say; I would not let it grieve me, now. (…) Vardaman’s getting big now, and with you to take good care of them all. I would try not to let it grieve me. I expect you’d better go and get some supper ready. It don’t have to be much. But they’ll need to eat, and she looking at him, saying You could do so much for me if you just would. If you just knew. I am I and you are you and I know it and you don’t know it and you could do so much for me if you just would and if you just would then I could tell you and then nobody would have to know it except you and me and Darl” (46-47).

Darl’s thoughts in this section reveal a number of important aspects. Firstly, as these are Darl’s thoughts, they show that he has picked up on the undertones in the scene where Dewey Dell is ordered to go prepare dinner. Darl is imagining Doc Peabody corroborating the apparently obvious fact that Dewey Dell is to take over Addie’s household responsibilities. Darl has perceived the social dynamic in which women’s choices are restricted by sexism, as it is assumed by all men that the daughter will now take care of the household without complaint after her mother’s death. Secondly, Darl has also picked up on how this sexism will cause Dewey Dell to come into despair. Darl is imagining a scene where Dewey Dell wants to turn to Doc Peabody for help. She needs help as she is trapped by the restrictions imposed on her by her sex, by her facticity, and she is not able to freely choose her future and is hindered in developing her true self leaving her in despair. Furthermore, there is a third aspect to Darl’s vision. When Dewey Dell is saying that Doc Peabody “could do so much for her” and that “then nobody would have to know it except you and me and Darl”, she is talking about her illegitimate pregnancy and the illegal abortion that she desperately wants, revealing that Darl is fully aware of Dewey Dell’s unfortunate situation.

The story behind Dewey Dell’s pregnancy is slowly unfolded throughout the novel from the perspective of Dewey Dell herself and Darl. Dewey Dell is out picking cotton along with a neighbor, Lafe, and they play an “I-Will” game during the picking. If her sack is full by the time they get to the end of the road she thinks “I will” (22), although it is never clarified what she will. For Dewey Dell it becomes a game of fate. In her mind she is not making a conscious choice, but instead she is letting fate rule. As mentioned, it is never defined exactly what she will do. Nevertheless, it becomes obvious later that it is something shameful as seen through the eyes of Darl. Here, Sartre’s theory of the Look is in full effect through Darl. Dewey Dell does not feel shameful while she and Lafe are picking, nor does she feel shameful when they first emerge from the woods. But when Darl sees Dewey Dell and Lafe as they come out from the edge of the forest, Dewey Dell understands her situation through the Look of Darl: “It was then, and then I saw Darl and he knew. He said he knew without the words” (23). Through the Look, Dewey Dell feels shame indicating that she and Lafe have done something not socially acceptable. Coupled with the knowledge that Dewey Dell becomes pregnant, it becomes obvious that Dewey Dell and Lafe had sex. The symbolism of Dewey Dell and Lafe as they start out by putting picked cotton into separate sacks, and then Lafe starts to put cotton into Dewey Dell’s sack, is also a strong indicator that the couple had sex, and that she becomes pregnant by Lafe.

Dewey Dell is trapped by the sexism of southern society. She is in peril of becoming stigmatized because she is pregnant outside of marriage. As the Bundren family travels towards Jefferson to bury Addie, Dewey Dell is on her own quest to avoid stigmatization. Lafe has given her ten dollars to get medicine that will induce an abortion (189). This quest leads to a feeling of shame and Otherness through the Look. As the family arrives in Mottson, the first bigger town they encounter, Dewey Dell goes to the drug-store. This encounter is narrated by the pharmacist, Moseley, and is a good indicator of how Dewey Dell is exposed to the Look by a man. Dewey Dell starts by asking for medicine. Moseley immediately assumes that she wants “female dope”. When Dewey Dell stops him and says that “It’s the female trouble” (188), Moseley assumes that she means her period. It is not until Dewey Dell tells him her period has stopped that he understands she wants medicine to induce an abortion. Moseley’s description of Dewey Dell’s appearance is suggestive of classism as he notices her simple dress and bare feet, as well as how she seems to be used to having bare feet. Her simple appearance prompts Moseley to ask another employee to help her until he is forced to do so himself (187). Moseley’s description of Dewey Dell also indicates that she is very much feeling his Look upon her and that she feels Otherized by it through her shame: “Her face was lowered a little, still, like they do in all their dealings with a man so he don’t ever know just where the lightning will strike next” (189). As abortion was illegal in Faulkner’s time, Moseley’s very negative reaction to her query is understandable. But Moseley’s advice for her to tell the male members of her family about her pregnancy and to get married as soon as possible is indicative of the sexism imposed on Dewey Dell’s choices as an unmarried, pregnant woman. When Dewey Dell enters the pharmacy in Jefferson she also becomes a victim of classism when the pharmacist, McGowan, asks what kind of woman has entered the store. The answer is a “country woman” (229) which prompts McGowan to want to send Dewey Dell away. That is until he realizes that Dewey Dell “looks pretty good for a country girl” (229). McGowan becomes interested as he wants to see the good looking country girl, but also because he has labeled her as a country girl and as less intelligent. This is proven when he tricks her to come back later by telling her that he is a doctor and he can help her. McGowan assumes that a country girl is easy to take advantage of. In this case, Dewey Dell is desperate enough to try her luck with McGowan and does not let the obvious classism bother her.

Dewey Dell is not legally allowed to have an abortion, nor is it accepted that she would have a baby without being married as that means she has had sex outside of wedlock. Dewey Dell is fully aware of the predicament that she is in. She never says that she wants an abortion because she knows it is illegal. She also knows that marrying Lafe might not be a possibility, since he was the one who told her to get an abortion. Furthermore her desperation when she is turned down by Moseley and later tricked by McGowan shows us how she knows that having the baby will leave her stigmatized and possibly ostracized.

Dewey Dell’s despair is of the conscious sort. We can argue this because she is aware of the dichotomy between men and women. We see this through her “I-will” game with Lafe in which she gambles sex. Instead of making a decision on her own, instead of saying yes or no to Lafe, she lets a game decide for her. She possibly does this because she does not think she can say no to Lafe, so she resigns herself to her fate as an oppressed Other. This oppression can be illustrated by Lafe suddenly putting cotton into Dewey Dell’s sack, expressing authority that way and making the decision for both of them.

Another point that makes Dewey Dell’s despair appear conscious is the fact that she is desperate enough for an abortion that she lets herself get taken sexual advantage of by McGowan. Given that she is desperate enough to do this, it indicates that she is conscious of the social stigmatization that follows pregnancy outside of marriage. This consciousness extends into despair. Her desperation comes off clear when she says to Vardaman naught but minutes after McGowan took advantage of her “it ain’t going to work (…) that son of a bitch” (239). She refers to how she knows that the stuff McGowan gave her will not give her the abortion that he promised her it would. This also shows us Dewey Dell’s attitude towards men, and how she appears either indifferent towards them, as in the case of Lafe and the game, or resents them, as in the case of McGowan. She is clearly aware that there is a dichotomy present whenever there is a male present to exert authority over her.

Dewey Dell’s mother, Addie Bundren, is a parallel to her daughter. She makes intentional choices to try and overcome the conscious despair that she feels. Addie narrates one chapter in *As I Lay Dying* after her death. In the chapter she is retelling her story of her struggle with her identity and the restrictions on her freedom in the shape of sexist gender roles which she is forced to endure. Addie works as a teacher, but she hates her job. She also feels compelled to marry Anse and have his children, but she doesn’t really like him, nor does she like their children all too much (159). Marriage and children are key elements to the female role in the dichotomy of the South, and Addie only reluctantly succumbs to this, indicating that she is possibly aware of how much despair this sexist succumbing will bring her, yet she feels that she has no other choice but to do it because the dichotomy is too strong to successfully challenge. She has inherited the idea from her father that “the reason for living was to get ready to stay dead a long time” (157), showing us that she is resigned to her fate as a marginalized woman. She projects her despair onto Anse and thus transfers the blame for her social restrictions onto him, which explains why she hates him. She blames him for the despair that she feels over the sexism in society. Her hate symbolizes how she would rather stay passive in her conscious despair rather than active. Hate is indicative of blame and blame is indicative of inaction and resignation on one’s own behalf. One would rather blame others for one’s circumstances than try to change one’s circumstances.

Both Addie and Dewey Dell fall deeper and deeper into despair as their choices harden their positions and leave them with fewer options to redeem their identity and lose their Otherness as a result. Neither of the two women are able to renounce their role as a marginalized Other. In fact, when Addie dies, Dewey Dell is even forced to echo her mother’s life and take on the housekeeping responsibilities, adding onto the Otherness that she already felt before this.

* + 1. **Sexism in *Flags in the Dust* (2012) – Aunt Jenny, Narcissa, and Belle**

*Flags in the Dust* introduces the matriarch as an opposition to the patriarch. The roles of Southern women changed dramatically after the Civil War and World War I. Previously, women had been restricted by sexism in the form of their roles as wives, mothers and housekeepers. After the Civil War, women had to rely on their own hard work or male family members who were not able to join the wars because many men never returned home to their families after the wars. Women were forced to either fend for themselves or abandon their homes and move in with relatives. As such the female sex had to become more self-assertive and less reliant on patriarchs. However, this did not mean that the new self-assertive women, the potential matriarchs, were less in despair or less Otherized than the submissive women before them. Women were still considered a marginalized Other in the face of the male sex. They still struggled with making choices that were free of the dichotomy in the South that pitted the female sex against the male sex in a battle for social dominance and the will to make your own decisions, freeing yourself of your despair and Otherness.

In *Flags in the Dust* the most prominent matriarch is Virginia Du Pre, also known as Aunt Jenny. A widow after the Civil War and matriarchal in her behavior, Aunt Jenny inhabits this newly established role of the self-assertive woman after WWI. Throughout *Flags in the Dust*, Aunt Jenny is described with self-assertive traits that are typically associated with the male sex in Faulkner’s day and age. Aunt Jenny speaks with “forthrightness” (29) and does not keep her mind to herself even when it breaks the social rules. Aunt Jenny also does not hold back when she is displeased: “She had a fine command of language at all times, but when her ire was aroused she soared without effort to sublime heights” (37). This “fine command of language” causes people obey her without hesitation, even men.

Through her behavior, Aunt Jenny does not seem to care about other people’s view of her, exactly like a patriarch also would not. Aunt Jenny can therefore be argued to adhere to Beauvoir’s concept of choice with regards to women. Beauvoir claimed that women were used to the restrictions imposed on them by a patriarchal society. As a consequence, these restrictions became invisible and thus went undisputed by women. Beauvoir contends that the only way for women to free themselves from the restrictions and achieve the necessary freedom to develop their self, is to make choices that go against the patriarchal restrictions. In other words, women are to ignore the fear of the shame which arises through the Look and make choices solely to develop their identity and not be in despair because of their sex alone. Aunt Jenny does not feel the shame of the Look. She is opinionated. On one occasion, Aunt Jenny advises a young woman, Narcissa, to marry, yet she also states that she hates marriage herself (264-265; 305). In a time and place where social opinions would state that women should feel lucky to marry given the lack of prospective husbands, Aunt Jenny’s negative view of marriage is a strong statement of integrity and self-assertiveness. Moreover, when Narcissa shows Aunt Jenny a love letter that she has received from an anonymous admirer, Narcissa says that she feels filthy because of it. In a society where women are the marginalized Other, it is also the women who are considered in the wrong if a man becomes attracted to them and acts on that attraction whether it is wanted or not. Aunt Jenny does not adhere to this idea. Instead she responds: “How can this thing make you feel filthy? Any young woman is liable to get an anonymous letter” (64). Aunt Jenny puts the responsibility for any misdeeds on the man instead of the woman. This stance reflects her opinion on sexism. Where most of the town would see it as shameful for Narcissa to receive an anonymous letter from an admirer, Aunt Jenny does not see any shame in it for Narcissa. Rather Aunt Jenny places the shame on the anonymous sender. Moreover, she also declares that it is only normal for a young woman to be flattered. Young women are supposed to be demure, but Aunt Jenny is against this notion and sees it as natural for Narcissa to feel flattered by the letters.

However, simply because Aunt Jenny is self-assertive and a strong matriarch, it does not make her free of despair. Her masculine behavior does not free her from the inherent Otherness that lies in her stigmatized female sex. As a matriarch, all the choices that she makes for herself are rooted in her role as a caretaker, and she is not free to choose independently of her family. A patriarch is also a caretaker, but he is considered a less empathic one. Because of his male sex, he is considered an authority, an authoritative caretaker. On the other hand, because of the matriarch’s female sex, she is considered a nurturing caretaker. This leaves more restrictions on her shoulders than on the patriarch’s shoulders. She must show empathy. She must be selfless. She must sacrifice. The patriarch must protect. He must control.

Aunt Jenny’s matriarchal role in the Sartoris family is that of the nurturing caretaker. She keeps the household running smoothly by commanding the Negro servants with an iron fist and to attempt to keep the Sartoris men from becoming too reckless and killing themselves. Aunt Jenny continuously curses the Sartoris men for their selfish recklessness. Nevertheless, she does what she can to protect and help them. When Young Bayard first arrives home after WWI, she watches over him when he sleeps and soothes him when he wakes up from a nightmare (46). She also forces Old Bayard to come with her to see Doctor Alford to get the wen on his face checked (92). Furthermore Aunt Jenny uses her masculine traits to protect the Sartoris men. When Young Bayard hurts his head and drives around with his new friends instead of going home to rest, she calls the Jefferson Marshal and asks him to find Young Bayard and keep him safe until the morning. When the men protest at this, the Marshal simply says “I ruther make Bayard mad than Miss Jenny” (154). Aunt Jenny manages to use her well established power of speech to force a Marshal to take care of her kin instead of rightfully arresting him for driving around drunk. Aunt Jenny’s criticism of the Sartoris men’s reckless behavior also stems from her need to protect them. Her own husband, Bayard Sartoris from Carolina, had been killed by his own recklessness during the Civil War. She had not been able to protect him, so instead she is protecting his relatives.

The Sartoris men need Aunt Jenny to be the strong matriarch who provides for them, and therefore she cannot afford to show weakness. When Old Bayard is killed in the car accident and Young Bayard runs away, due to his guilt, Aunt Jenny does not spend her time outwardly mourning. Instead she spends her time cursing the recklessness of the Sartoris men and preparing for the new generation in the form of Narcissa’s and Young Bayard’s child (379). Since Aunt Jenny has to be strong for the Sartoris men, she is not allowed to mourn the loss of one and the disappearance of another. When Aunt Jenny receives the news of Young Bayard’s death, she reverts to cursing his recklessness instead of crying over it: “Thank God that’s the last one. For a while, anyway” (393). There are no grown Sartoris men left to take care of, not until Narcissa’s and Young Bayard’s child grows up, so she does not have to spend her time tempering their recklessness. This might be why she promptly decides to become bedridden and stays in bed for exactly three weeks no matter what. However, after three weeks she decides that she is done lying in bed and gets up even against the advice of those around her.

Aunt Jenny’s reaction to the deaths of two family members and her short-lived illness illustrates the fact that while a patriarch is not generally in despair due to his authoritative nature, a matriarch is in despair due to her nurturing and selfless nature that leaves her open for the Look and thereby Otherness. She is open because her authority is rooted in empathy and therefore leaves her more vulnerable than the patriarch whose authority is rooted in control. We can also say that a matriarch is in despair, because she is neither fully a man, nor fully a woman. Aunt Jenny is restricted as she does not fit fully into the role as either woman or man. Aunt Jenny becomes an Other not just in her Otherness from men in her form of a marginalized woman, but also in her Othering from women as she exhibits masculine traits and does not follow typical gender norms. Aunt Jenny’s despair may appear conscious since she consistently and vocally despairs over life in general. However, this despair is focused on other people and not herself. She acts on the despair of others, not on her own, because that is what the nurturing matriarch does. Therefore, it may be more relevant to speak of her despair as unconscious, since she focuses primarily on the despair of others and less on the despair that she may feel for herself.

Where Aunt Jenny represents the southern matriarch, Narcissa represents the more traditionally subdued southern woman. Narcissa is portrayed as “grave and serene” (29) and frequently described using flower terminology: “in her face was that tranquil repose of lilies” (30). Yet she is a product of her time, of the budding modern age, and therefore she also inhabits traits such as self-assertiveness, albeit a quiet type and not the matriarchal type like Aunt Jenny. Narcissa drives a car in a time and place where not all people owned cars, and those who did were mostly men. During WWI, she also joined the Red Cross in town and helped out families without means “while other women talked of their menfolks into her grave receptivity” (72). However, while joining the Red Cross can be said to be more active and thus more masculine than sitting idly at home waiting for the war to end, it is still an occupation which requires people to possess nurturing traits and thus traits which are traditionally female.

For Narcissa, inheriting the role as housekeeper of the family is reminiscent of Dewey Dell’s inherited role. However, where Dewey Dell is still dominated by the men in her family, Narcissa rather dominates her father and brother (173). Narcissa reflects Aunt Jenny’s need to nurture and protect her family. In Narcissa’s case her family is Horace. At the same time, Narcissa is an independent unmarried woman who lives alone when Horace or the neighbor, Aunt Sally, are not there. Narcissa also likes the freedom of driving herself around in her own car. This dichotomy of being both the newer self-assertive woman and the more traditional nurturing woman sums up Narcissa’s despair and her feeling of Otherness.

As an unmarried woman, she is Otherized by the Look of her neighbors and is forced to tread carefully so as not to cause offense. Having Aunt Sally move in while Horace is away, is one way of minimizing the risk of gossip and scandal. Narcissa’s despair is furthered when she gets involved with Young Bayard. Her involvement can be argued to be an attempt to free herself from her role as an unmarried woman and an Other in spite of how she does not initially wish to do so. Initially, she dislikes Young Bayard and likes her independence. She likes not to be married. However, after being subjected to the Looks of the Jefferson public and being Otherized by her non-married state in a dichotomy that praises marriage for women, she accepts Bayard and gives into the traditional female role of a married woman. This is an attempt of hers to remove her despair and Otherness, namely by playing into the traditional role of the woman.

So, although Narcissa follows Beauvoir’s theory that women should make choices based on the wish to free themselves from their restrictions, Narcissa is still restricted. In fact Narcissa becomes even more restricted by her sex, not to mention Otherized, as Young Bayard runs away in disgrace and leaves her pregnant and living with his family on her own. Just like Aunt Jenny, Narcissa is in despair as a consequence of being held suspended between modernized values and traditional values, of being held suspended between independence and interdependence, of being held suspended between inherent feminine traits and adopted masculine traits.

Another aspect of Narcissa’s role as an Other is the circumstance of the anonymous letters. The letters are written by Byron Snopes and are a strong representation of Sartre’s theory of the Look and how it creates Otherness through shame. The contents of Snopes’ letters all revolve around him watching her:

“I saw my letter in your hand satchel today. Every day I can put my hand out and touch you you do not know it. Just to see you walk down the street (…). I think of you at night the way you walk down the street like I was dirt. (…) I know more than watch you walk down the street with cloths” (108).

It is possible, and even probable, that women will be watched by men without knowing it and vice versa. Through his letters, Snopes is making Narcissa aware that he is watching her and that he is close enough to touch her. He is also remarking on her keeping his letters safe instead of throwing them away. Narcissa keeps the letters despite stating that they make her feel filthy (64). When Snopes makes her aware of his Look upon her through his letters, and she sees herself through his Look, she feels filthy and ashamed. This is because his Look is based on desire. His desire forces Narcissa to see herself as desirable and as a sexual being. In a time when sexuality was seen as negative and attributed to prostitutes or otherwise fallen women, it was not a positive feminine trait to be sexual. Snopes’ Look thus makes Narcissa feel ashamed, because he makes her aware of attributes that are regarded as negative by society and leaves her in danger of being Otherized furtherer. This risk of Otherness is made clear when Narcissa revisits her old room in the house that she shared with Horace. She cannot remember what she did with the letters that Snopes has taken, and she feels fearful that others will see them: “she considered the possibility that people might learn that someone had thought such things about her and put them into words” (310). For Narcissa it is not only the shame she feels from knowing that someone has thought about her sexually, but also that others might learn that someone has thought sexually about her. Narcissa, being the marginalized Other to men, will bear the blame if the letters came to light, and she would be seen as a harlot. This fear of public shaming restricts her choices and creates despair.

Narcissa repeatedly asserts her negative feelings towards men stating “I hate all men” (162) and that “there would be peace for her only in a world where there were no men at all” (251). These sentiments show her awareness of her Otherness and how this Otherness lies in the dichotomy between men and women. It can then be argued that she is conscious of her despair as she believes that in a world without men, she would be at peace, indicating that she is aware of the dichotomy in southern society and how she inhabits the marginalized and oppressed spectrum of that.

A third important female character in *Flags in the Dust* is Belle Mitchell. Belle is married to Harry and they have a daughter together. Belle is unhappy in her marriage with Harry and despairs over it, enough to instigate an affair with Horace. Like Aunt Jenny and Narcissa, Belle exhibits both feminine and masculine traits. Yet Belle possesses more masculine traits than either Aunt Jenny or Narcissa do, which is illustrated by how the men in Belle’s life consistently refer to her as an animal, indicating that there is a power there, not to mention a lack of nurture, which is absent from most other women of the time and which the men themselves may feel emasculated by. Harry, her husband, describes Belle as “some kind of a wild animal. A dam tiger or something” (192), and after having married Belle, Horace Benbow muses repeatedly “Thou wast happier in thy cage” (371; 372; 374; 376; 379).

Belle’s Otherness is first and foremost rooted in her female sex, but also in her roles as wife and mother. This is a contrast to all of the other female characters that we have analyzed so far. Belle feels trapped as Harry’s wife. She does not seem to possess nurturing traits towards her daughter as she always sends little Belle away when she comes near her mother (190). Women were expected to be satisfied with their roles as nurturer of the family. Both Aunt Jenny and Narcissa accept these roles even if those roles are partly to blame for their despair. However, Belle is unable to accept the restrictions which follow the roles as wife, mother, and woman. Therefore she starts an affair with Horace ending up in a divorce from Harry. Belle discards the social rules which surround women in order to follow Beauvoir’s theory and free herself from her cage. However, Belle’s choices lead to stigmatization, as Narcissa exemplifies: “Oh, Horry, she’s dirty!” (206). With this stigmatization comes despair yet again. Belle tried to get rid of her despair by divorcing Harry, yet this only leads to further despair. Belle is forced to move away from Jefferson and Horace follows her. Unfortunately, Horace lied to Belle, and he is not able to provide her with a lifestyle at the social level she is accustomed to. Belle now finds herself in a position of Otherness more than ever before. While she initially suffered from despair over her unwanted role as mother and wife, she now suffers from having tried to break free from those unwanted roles and rid herself of her despair. She keeps to herself in her new house where there is no one to judge her and make her feel more ashamed than what she, now a divorcee and a socialite with no one of her status to socialize with, in all probability already feels.

A possible example of a woman who does not despair over her modernity is Belle’s sister Joan. Joan has been married and divorced several times. She does not care much for social conventions and simply does what she wants. She arrives in Jefferson when Belle has moved away from town, but while Horace still lives there. She wants to meet the man for whom her sister is divorcing her husband Harry. The two of them end up having a sexual relationship. Joan reveals no scruples over this nor does she care much about whether others know what they are doing: “she had begun coming to his house, coming without secrecy and with an unhurried contempt for possible eyes and ears and tongues” (321). Joan is not afraid of scandal and is therefore not shamefaced by the Looks of others. Joan appears the most non-Othered woman in *Flags in the Dust* and this is largely due to her nonchalant attitude towards the opinions of others and towards sexism in general. In that way, she harbors matriarchal qualities like Aunt Jenny. She has chosen to scorn social rules and is as such not restricted by her facticity as a woman. Social rules do not affect her choices. She is also alone, and one might be tempted to believe that she has left her previous husbands of her own accord. She does not want to be emotionally trapped like Aunt Jenny and Narcissa. She does not want to be the nurturing matriarch, but perhaps more the authoritative patriarch. This is shown in the one demand she makes of Horace: “that he refrain from talking to her of love. “I’m tired of having to listen to it and talk and act a lot of childish stupidity”” (322). Joan does not want to be the dutiful and doting wife who follows the rules that her husband and society dictates. She also does not want to pretend anymore, so she makes the rule that hers and Horace’s relationship is to be superficial. Of all the characters in the novel, Joan is portrayed as the least despairing one, but this may also be because we get to know little about her, and what we get to know is second-hand knowledge only.

In *Flags in the Dust,* the women characters make an interesting perspective because we are dealing with changing gender values. We have the traditional subversive women as we see them in the dichotomy of the South, but we also have a newer and more modern woman who is self-assertive and who is beginning to challenge the dichotomy of the South, although she finds this difficult. While the dichotomy makes her despair, challenging the dichotomy offers the same result. Aunt Jenny, Narcissa and Belle are all trapped in between traditional social values in the form of subversion and modern social values in the form of self-assertiveness. This despair over feeling trapped in between values adds to the Otherness that is already inherent in the female sex from the decades of authoritative southern paternalism that has shaped the female sex into the dominated one. Joan, perhaps, is the only female character in the novel who represents the modern woman as not being in despair, and this is because she has managed to shed her traditional role completely and has embraced her modernity regardless of the social stigmatization that this would inevitably lead to.

* + 1. **Sexism in *Light in August* (2005) *-* Joanna Burden**

*Light in August* contains several examples of marginalization of women and women in despair. However, one female character stands out, namely Joanna Burden. Joanna is an independent woman living alone in her own house and is in charge of her own income, which is one of the reasons that she is ostracized by the community, namely because she is in charge of her own life and this adds to her Otherness in the face of sexism. For example, when Joe Christmas first comes to her bedroom, he describes her final surrender to him as manlike (176-177), and later she seems to perceive herself as manlike or sexless when Christmas is watching her pray (211). Joanna is therefore also Othered by the Jefferson townsfolk partly because of her past, since her family came from the North and this makes her as a Yankee, and partly because she lives alone without any form of masculine supervision or family. She also visibly supports the black community in a part of the country where the black community is looked upon with distaste.

She, like the female characters in *Flags in the Dust* (2012), suffers under changing social values, under modernity versus tradition, and this causes her despair. Her despair is enhanced through her relationship with Christmas and this is what leads her to eventually break and suggest that she and Christmas commit suicide together as two marginalized Others. After instigating the relationship with Christmas, after engaging in miscegenation, Joanna finally defies a social rule that is too grand to step away from, not to mention that she goes against her own Christian religion by doing so. If people were to find out about her trysts with Christmas, she would be completely ostracized, more so than what she already is for sympathizing with the Negroes, and she would become a pariah. She would most likely not be welcome in church, and since she already consistently prays in an attempt to clean herself from the sin of her relationship with Christmas, being forced to abandon her religion would create despair in itself as it is an important part of her identity. Joanna is out of choices that would improve her situation. Instead she is left with choices that would all worsen her despair and as such she opts for suicide to escape it.

* + 1. **Sexism in *Absalom, Absalom* (2005)– Rosa Coldfield and Judith Sutpen**

In *Absalom, Absalom* (2005),there are two important female characters that represent sexism and the accompanying despair that comes from being subjected to the Looks of others. Rosa Coldfield and Judith Sutpen have similar life conditions. They both live alone after their mothers have died, and the men in their families have either joined the Civil War or are dead. They are both in a situation that is precarious to women, and it is a situation where the Jefferson community assesses them for every step that they take. Rosa is an unmarried spinster, adding to her Otherness, and Judith became a widow before she ever became a bride, adding to her Otherness.

Rosa Coldfield lives alone after her mother died during Rosa’s birth, and her father died after locking himself in the attic to avoid being conscripted in the Civil War. During the Civil War, Rosa moves in with Judith and Clytie in the Sutpen mansion, but she moves back out after the Civil War due to a failed engagement to her brother-in-law, Thomas Sutpen, after his return from the war and the death of his first wife. Rosa’s despair over her Otherness prevents her from having social relationships with men. This may also be because her despair is rooted in her fatherless existence and the shameful way that this came about. If her Otherness is partly rooted in her father’s disgraceful suicide, it stands to reason that Rosa would associate all men with her despair and try to avoid them as best as possible. She fantasized about Charles Bon, but never talked to him, and when Thomas Sutpen suggests that they have a child out of wedlock, Rosa calls off their engagement. It would be against social conventions for her to have sex before marriage, let alone to have a child outside marriage. Sutpen might be in a position as a white man, where he would not be Otherized for an illegitimate child, but that is not the case for Rosa. An illegitimate child would enhance her Otherness and thereby despair. Rosa is left to fend for herself, living alone in the house where she grew up. Like Addie Bundren in *As I Lay Dying* (2004), she has made the decision to live with her despair, although it makes her bitter and resentful.

Judith Sutpen can be argued to live in less despair than Rosa. Judith’s father does not care much for public opinion and this may have affected Judith in the sense that she also cares little for public opinion. Their relationship is close in spite of Sutpen’s general apathy towards all people (Absalom, Absalom, 2005, 159), and the fact that Judith lives with Rosa, an unmarried woman, and Clytie, a Negress, in the Sutpen mansion while Sutpen himself is out fighting in the Civil War further emphasizes Judith’s indifference towards social and public opinion. She also lives fairly secluded on her father’s plantation, which enables her to be independent and less worried about the Look from her neighbors.

* 1. **Review of Racism, Classism and Sexism in Faulkner’s Novels**

Racism, classism and sexism are three discriminatory social conditions, three southern sins of the fathers, that make up the social dichotomy of the South that Faulkner presents in his novels and which takes its inspiration from and has its fundament in the authentic South of the US. This dichotomy supports white patriarchy and oppresses women and Negroes. All individuals that tries to free themselves from the dichotomy end up in despair, be that Negroes, women or white men. By trying to free themselves from the dichotomy, these individuals draw attention to themselves as Others, resulting in stigmatization. This leaves them unable to develop an authentic identity against the pre-made identities that the dichotomy already dictates, and they become social pariahs trapped in despair over not being themselves, but rather being what the dichotomy dictates. They live under the restriction of being unable to make choices in life that are free of the dichotomy. Negroes furthermore despair over their double consciousness, the veil in which they look at themselves through the eyes of white people. Women are held suspended between old and traditional gender values versus modernized gender values, while white men despair over classism through their inferiority to other white men and how their opportunities in life are fewer and lesser than those of their white economic superiors.

It is possible to resign yourself to your despair and your lack of free choice in the dichotomy, such as Anse Bundren, Addie Bundren and Rosa Coldfield have done. It is also possible to refuse your despair, as in the case of Thomas Sutpen. Likewise, it is possible to fight against your despair, as in the case of Clytie Sutpen, Joe Christmas, Narcissa Benbow and Belle’s sister Joan. Fighting against your despair seemingly ends in demise for the Negroes in Faulkner’s novels, illustrated by the deaths of Christmas and Clytie, whilst white women appear to have better success, illustrated by Narcissa Benbow and Joan. This may be a remnant of the slave trade and how racism is a more stigmatized and guilt-ridden discriminatory social condition than sexism and therefore it is harder to successfully process the despair that arises from it.

The majority of Faulkner’s characters are conscious of their despair, which is something worth to note when you consider that Kierkegaard called the conscious despair for the most uncommon kind. Why, if Kierkegaard called the conscious despair the rare one, do all of Faulkner’s characters embody this?

One argument could be that racism, classism and sexism are such strong discriminatory social conditions in the American South with enough impact on their victims that these victims can do naught but be aware of the despair that they feel.

Another argument could be that whilst the unconscious despair was the common one during Kierkegaard’s time, it may no longer be the most common one during Faulkner’s time. At the time of Faulkner, there may have been more of a focus on psychological health as a result of higher overall humanitarian standards. There may have been more of a focus on battling identity disorders than in Kierkegaard’s time. Although Kierkegaard himself certainly was interested in psychological health and in identity, it does not mean that the rest of his society was. This is supported by the fact that Kierkegaard has had more success after his death than during his lifetime, proven by how he was coined an existentialist only post-mortem.

A last argument would be that since we are dealing with pieces of fiction, the despair will have to be conscious in order for the fictional works to hold any sort of substance and interest to a reader. If a fictional character is unconscious of his despair, then what would there be to write about? There would be no conflict and no resolution. There would be no progress and no character development. There would, essentially, be nothing to write about. This argument holds especially true when we consider how Faulkner himself has explicitly stated that what interested him in his authorship was the human heart in conflict. This was a matter that Faulkner expressed in his 1950 Nobel Prize speech most adamantly, because how can the human heart be in conflict if the human heart is not aware that it is in despair and therefore in conflict? When hearing that part of Faulkner’s speech, it is not hard to understand exactly why most of his characters have despaired consciously rather than unconsciously:

“Our tragedy today is a general and universal physical fear so long sustained by now that we can even bear it. There are no longer problems of the spirit. There is only the question: When will I be blown up? Because of this, the young man or woman writing today has forgotten the problems of the human heart in conflict with itself which alone can make good writing because only that is worth writing about, worth the agony and the sweat. He must learn them again. He must teach himself that the basest of all things is to be afraid; and, teaching himself that, forget it forever, leaving no room in his workshop for anything but the old verities and truths of the heart, the old universal truths lacking which any story is ephemeral and doomed – love and honor and pity and pride and compassion and sacrifice. Until he does so, he labors under a curse. He writes not of love but of lust, of defeats in which nobody loses anything of value, of victories without hope and, worst of all, without pity or compassion. His griefs grieve on no universal bones, leaving no scars. He writes not of the heart but of the glands.” (ByWayofBeautyDotCom, 2013)

1. **Discriminatory Social Conditions - Then and Now**

Through his literature, Faulkner’s scrutinizes the social conditions of the American South that he grew up in. He recognized that these social conditions affect the people of the South to such a degree that they live in despair and Otherness according to the theories of Kierkegaard and Sartre. He implemented this observation of his into his fictional works, making it the very trademark of his authorship.

When analyzing Faulkner’s novels, it quickly becomes apparent that he wished to portray the social conditions of Negroes in the form of racism. This is especially apparent in those of Faulkner’s novels which circulate the time of the Civil War such as *Light in August* (2005)and *Absalom, Absalom* (2005). *Light in August* takes place in the early 1900s, yet it largely communicates Civil War attitudes in the shape of the public dislike towards Joe Christmas and Mrs. Burden’s, the Yankee’s, interracial relationship, plus the repeated references to the Civil War as in the case of Reverend Hightower. *Absalom, Absalom* takes place around the Civil War since the novel relays Thomas Sutpen’s life, including his time in the Confederate army. In each novel we also have a character that lives in the past and in the perceived glory that was the antebellum South, this being Quentin in *Absalom, Absalom* and Reverend Hightower in *Light in August*. The reason why racism is the most prevalent in the novels that take place closer to the Civil War may be because racism leads back to the problematic of slavery, which was one of the greater discrepancies of the war. However, that is not to say that racism is absent from the novels set around World War I, namely *As I Lay Dying* and *Flags in the Dust*. In those novels, we see that the younger Negro generation has begun to stand up against the racism that is still prevalent in society. What is new around this time, though, is that we also see the slow unraveling of gender roles. It is here, in these novels set around World War I, that we see the true rise of the modern woman begin and where the political topic of sexism is brought up for debate more often than not. Faulkner’s interest in the social conditions of Negroes in the South is corroborated by the amount of comments that he makes regarding this issue during his interviews at the University of Virginia. Although Faulkner can be seen as favoring the theme of racial issues, he has extended his notion of racism to include white people’s racism against white people, this in the form of classism.

We have argued that classism is the racism of the white man against the white man. Faulkner’s examination of classism extends through the entire timeline of his books, meaning that classism is present in the novels that take place around the Civil War as well as those novels that take place much later. Classism has always been present in society. Those who have financial means have the power to control others. It therefore makes sense that classism as a social condition is more or less prevalent in all of Faulkner’s works.

Compared to racism, classism and sexism are subtler issues in Faulkner’s novels in the sense that he never took much of an explicit stand on these. He does not directly comment on either of the two issues in his Virginia interviews in spite of how they make up just as large a part of his novels as racism does. This may be because racism is the most guilt-ridden social condition of the three, a consequence of institutional slavery and the repercussions thereof on an entire nation, and it is therefore the discriminatory condition that Faulkner wishes to exorcise the most from the southern conscience. Nonetheless, his literature is abundant with examples of women dealing with the problems caused by ingrained sexist discrimination in society. Sexism is represented in much of Faulkner’s literature but is exceedingly present in those of Faulkner’s novels where the story circulates the time after the Civil War and around WWI. *As I Lay Dying* (2004)and *Flags in the Dust* (2012) both take place after the Civil War and closer to World War I. A reason for this might be that women’s issues were overshadowed around the Civil War by debates over slavery. It was not until around WWI and the rise of modernity that women’s fight for gender equality began to be noticed and gain results. Therefore, Faulkner has not focused on women’s issues in those of his novels revolving around the Civil War, since it would not be a true portrayal of the conditions of the South at that time.

Faulkner set out to portray the social conditions of the South as he understood them, namely as sins of the fathers. Faulkner believed that in order for the South to progress and develop, it needed to exorcize its demons from the past, this being racism, classism, and sexism. The American Civil War particularly highlighted the issues of racism and to some extent helped to open up for a public discussion of racism. Faulkner was very active in this discussion and made many statements about slavery and racism during his interviews at the University of Virginia, though he never took an exact political stand on it. He believed that segregation would have to end in order to minimalize the marginalization of Negroes and women, a huge part of the American populace, but he also understood that the process would be slow. He also believed that the purpose of writing was to portray the human heart in conflict with itself. Through his literature, Faulkner had the opportunity to open people’s eyes to the discriminatory social problems that they had grown used to. Faulkner did not create a utopia in his writings. He did not write about a perfect world, but wrote the world with the flaws that he saw present in it. He did this because he understood the necessity of processing the sins of the fathers in order to achieve a utopia. In other words, he believed it necessary to process the past in order to better yourself and undo the wrongs in your society and move into a better future.

It may be said that Faulkner portrayed how slow the process of social development can be through his novels. For instance, in *Flags in the Dust* (2012) there still occurs lingering racism and Otherness even though the novel takes place closer to the modern era and not around the Civil War. This may be seen as Faulkner interpreting how racism and Otherness is not so easily exorcised, particularly not in the American South. This leaves us with the question of whether these social problems are still present in today’s society, and if they still have to be exorcised like Faulkner tried to do during his lifetime. There are current societal debates which would indicate that there is progress to be seen on this front, but also that there is still work to be done and sins of the fathers to be exorcised. Racism has been a loaded topic in the United States since the Civil War. Recent events show how volatile the topic still is. There have been several instances reported of shootings were the shooter was white and the victim was African-American. We can mention the case of Trayvon Martin. He was a black teenager who was shot and killed by George Zimmerman, a neighborhood watch volunteer, who spotted Martin as he was headed home from the convenience store. There had been several reports of robberies in the neighborhood and Zimmerman called the police to report Martin of suspicious behavior. Before the police could arrive at the scene, there had been an altercation between the two men wherein Martin was killed by Zimmerman. The incident sparked protests because Zimmerman was not immediately arrested due to Florida’s ‘stand your ground’ law that authorizes a person to protect and defend one’s own life against a threat or a perceived threat. Later instances such as the Michael Brown case have proven to spark even more violent reactions. Brown was shot and killed in Ferguson by a white police officer even though Brown was unarmed. The shooting prompted protests and riots which lasted for weeks only to erupt once again when the police officer was cleared of all charges. A main reason for the volatile situation in Ferguson leading to the protests was the issue that most of the police force consisted of white officers and the perceived disconnect between law enforcement and the primarily African-American community. Since then there has been greater scrutiny over shootings reported in the US where a white person, particularly those in positions of authority, have shot and killed a black person which has led to protests.

The political and public debates over North Carolina’s Confederate Flag being displayed at the state capital, that arose early in 2015, were an extension of these shootings. It showed us how delicate the topic of the Civil War still remains in the American conscience. Charleston, the state capital, in North Carolina had been using the flag for years, but it was not until a shooting occurred in which a white man shot several people in a predominantly black church that there arose a nationwide pressure for North Carolina to stop using the flag. The argument was that the flag was a racist symbol left over from the time of the Civil War.

The many shootings have sparked the Black Lives Matter campaign. This campaign’s main concern is to highlight the issues of violence towards black people with the underlying issues such as racial discrimination and police brutality. While the issue of violence against black people is not new, the nationwide reaction to it is. The Black Lives Matter campaign was founded by women, which would have been impossible in Faulkner’s time. It can therefore be said to be a campaign founded by an Otherized minority to help better the conditions of all Otherized minorities.

Cultural appropriation is an issue that has arisen in later decades almost as a counter-effect to racism and it is a highly loaded and ambiguous issue. While some people see cultural appropriation as an act of respect and admiration for another culture and race, some see it as offensive and as a racial mockery. We can mention Blackface, a cultural appropriation in which white people change their outer appearance to look African-American, and the case of Rachel Dolezal. She is a white woman who pretended to be black, becoming the president of the [National Association for the Advancement of Colored People](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/National_Association_for_the_Advancement_of_Colored_People) (NAACP). When her parents revealed to the public that she was white and not black, it sparked nationwide outrage. Rachel saw her cultural appropriation as a form of admiration for the African-American community, but the rest of the public and the African-American community itself did not.

Social awareness is what Faulkner tried to create through his works when he highlighted the plights of black people, and we can safely say that there has indeed been progress since Faulkner’s time and up until now. It would have been nearly impossible to imagine a black man becoming president of the United States in Faulkner’s time, but now Barack Obama has served two terms as president of the United States. However, this improvement does not mean that there is not more exorcizing to be done as exemplified by the recent shootings in Charleston and Ferguson, and the necessity of an organization such as Black Lives Matter.

Although sexism may not seem as apparent it is far from extinct in American society today. Women may have had more success at social equality than the African-American population – and here we mean white women, because black women may have had even lesser success at social quality than black men – but there are still ways in which sexism is present in our world today. Recently, there has been a focus on two social issues regarding women, namely the gender wage gap and the right to abortion. Studies have shown that the US women are generally paid less than men for the same amount of work, a clear testament to sexist discrimination in the workplace. The debate about women’s rights to abortion has been fueled by the Republican Party and its evangelical Christian voting bloc in the US. One thing to note about this debate is that it is mostly men who are arguing against women’s rights to abortion. Recent violent attacks against Planned Parenthood, an organization which provides women with the possibility of abortion, as well as laws limiting access to legal abortion and the gender wage gap indicate that sexism is still present in the US today.

Classism is possibly the most subtle issue in today’s society. Since the majority of America is literate and has access to education one way or another, classism functions mostly on the financial level. There is a great gap in wealth income throughout the USA, and it stands to reason that those with more wealth will dominate those with lesser wealth, thus we have a case of classism. Here, we can mention the Occupy Movement and their “We are the 99%” [political slogan](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Political_slogan). This refers directly to the [wealth inequality in the United States](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wealth_inequality_in_the_United_States) where we have a concentration of wealth among the top earning 1% of US citizens. It is here inferred that the 99% are subjected to the whims of the 1%, the upper-class, and must pay the price for the mistakes that this 1% may make. The income gap is perhaps most troubling when coupled with the political power that money holds. The 2010 Supreme Court decision in *Citizens United V. The Federal Election Commission* has opened to door to unlimited political campaign contributions from both individuals and organizations. The allowances of Citizens United have marginalized the average voter in comparison to large companies and other organizations who have a much greater ability to persuade lawmakers through the use of generous campaign contributions.

So, in Faulkner’s terminology, while the discriminatory social conditions of black people and women have improved since the 1920s, there is still room for improvement. This is not just in the South, but in the United States as a whole. The South may have managed to exorcise enough of their sins that they are on level with the North, but once that is said, the United States as a whole still has room for improvement when it comes to racism, classism and sexism.

In addition to themes of racism, classism and sexism, Faulkner also portrayed the aftermath of World War I. Faulkner belonged to the group of modernist writers labeled “The Lost Generation”. The Lost Generation consisted writers who came of age during World War I. Their experiences during World War I either as participants in the horror of the war or as spectators to the war left them disillusioned. The unrecognizable post-war world created a feeling of being lost as the American values of morality and religious faith which they had inherited were no longer relevant and the encroaching modern world seemed empty to them. Many of The Lost Generation writers hailed from the United States, but propelled by their aimlessness many ended up in Europe as American expatriates where they portrayed their disillusioned worldview in their works of literature. The literature that The Lost Generation produced revolved around the effects of the war and how these effects caused hopelessness due to their inability to let go of the world that they had once known and enter into the oncoming modern world. Faulkner personally knew and was influenced by some of the other Lost Generation writers, such as Sherwood Anderson and James Joyce. True to his Lost Generation affiliation Faulkner portrayed this post-war disillusionment as yet another problematic social condition in the South, though perhaps not as a discriminatory one. This disillusionment can be seen in *Flags in the Dust* (2012) in the case of Young Bayard, who returns from World War I in a state of disrepair. Young Bayard already had a reckless nature before he left for the war, but after his return he cannot settle into a quiet life and instead drives around aimlessly, seeking thrills reminiscent of the thrills found on a war-torn battlefield. To Young Bayard the world seems empty and pointless and so he challenges fate by riding a wild stallion, driving recklessly, and flying an untested airplane that leads to his death. The theme of post-war disillusionment caused by the loss of traditional values is part of Faulkner’s attempt to portray the human spirit in conflict with itself.

1. **Conclusion**

Through his novels, Faulkner has accounted for the social dichotomy of the South in which he saw the female and Negro populaces as systematically oppressed marginalized Others to the authoritative white male patriarch. Faulkner saw that this dichotomy was hard-pressed to change as a result of the internalized guilt within southern society over the discriminatory conditions of racism, classism and sexism that had been inherited from fathers to sons time and time again ever since the antebellum era. Faulkner saw how this guilt smothered any and all possibility for the dichotomy to change and for the social conditions of the South to better and be on par with the rest of the United States and its improved humanitarian standards. As the South felt guilt over their strong legacy of racism, classism and sexism, the people of the South were loath to talk about these conditions. They would rather ignore them and quietly pass them on to newer generations, making a change in the social dichotomy near impossible.

Through Søren Kierkegaard’s theory of despair and Jean-Paul Sartre’s theory of Otherness, we have used existentialism to shed light upon this social dichotomy of the South. The link between the philosophy of existentialism and the literary period of modernism has made this possible. Where modernist authors addressed the alienation of the individual and the sense of anguish that arose from this, existentialism aptly and accordingly addresses identity as a process and as something that causes alienation by robbing the individual of his freedom and choice. This alienation is what Kierkegaard calls despair. Sartre argues that this despair takes root in the feeling of Otherness that arises from looking at oneself through the eyes of others, through what he calls The Look.

In his fictional Yoknapatawpha County, Faulkner presents us with a mirror to the authentic American South through which he poses the argument that it is impossible for all southern individuals to reflect anything else but the social dichotomy of the South due to the guilt that this dichotomy is built up around. Whilst the individual already despairs over the oppressive effects of the dichotomy, it will only result in further despair and Otherness if the individual attempts to challenge this oppressiveness to rid itself of its despair, because then the individual addresses the taboo nature of the dichotomy for which everyone else will ostracize the individual, resulting in Otherness. There seemingly is little way to win against the despair.

In Faulkner’s case, the majority of his characters suffer from conscious despair. They are well aware of the fact that they are despairing under the oppressive dichotomy. This is partly because we are dealing with a piece of literature, which presupposes that there must be a conflict and resolution in the plot, which in turn presupposes that the characters need be aware of their despair. This fits with Faulkner’s focus on the conflict of the heart in all his literary endeavors.

For the Negro, challenging the oppressive dichotomy seems particularly perilous as it results in death or destruction, illustrated by Joe Christmas in *Light in August* and Clytie Sutpen in *Absalom, Absalom*. The only Negro whose despair is unconscious is that of Jim Bond, and his despair is unconscious only because he is intellectually challenged. This makes a strong case for the conscious despair and the double consciousness that Faulkner’s Negroes suffer from. On the other hand, it appears more lucrative, if one can call it that, for the white female to challenge the dichotomy through the modernization of traditional gender roles. She does not necessarily succeed in her challenge, as evidenced by Narcissa Benbow in *Flags in the Dust* who reluctantly succumbs to marriage and thus traditional gender roles, but her demise is decidedly less consequential than that of the Negroes. The female succeeds in the sense that she has managed to adopt matriarchal qualities to match those of the patriarch, yet this still ironically leaves her Otherized, since a matriarch is more prone to Otherness than a patriarch due to her nurturing and emphatic nature versus his authoritative and controlling nature. This is why she only nearly succeeds in challenging the dichotomy, as in the case of Aunt Jenny in *Flags in the Dust*, but does not succeed completely.

The reason to why it is more lucrative for women to challenge the dichotomy may be because racism is the more sensitive and taboo-ridden discriminatory social condition of the South, given the significant role that slavery played in the outbreak of the Civil War and the forming of the Confederacy in the South. Racism has more of a historical stigma than sexism and classism. It may therefore serve more of a backlash for a Negro to challenge the dichotomy than for a woman to do the same. For the white male, he despairs over his inferiority to other white men in the shape of classism and how this leaves him with fewer opportunities in life. Paradoxically, it is also possible for the authoritative white male patriarch to despair and be Otherized, as in the case of Thomas Sutpen, but only if he goes against the traditional role of the patriarch as the dichotomy dictates it.

Not all individuals challenge the dichotomy. Some remain resigned to their fate of Otherness, such as Addie, Dewey Dell and Anse Bundren in *As I Lay Dying*. Others learn to live successfully under the Otherizing dichotomy, such as Thomas Sutpen who lacks a conscience and therefore can successfully exist while ignoring that his identity is in despair.

Where Faulkner presented racism, classism and sexism as something near infinite and durable in his novels, we accordingly find these discriminatory conditions still present in the United States today, though to a definite lesser degree than in Faulkner’s time and age. It appears as if the South of today has managed to close part of the gap that separated it from the North during the 1920s, however the United States as a whole still struggles with humanitarian principles in the exacts shapes of racism, sexism and classism. The legacy is still there.

Faulkner interprets southern identity as stagnant, as something that is locked in the guilt of the past while the world around it progresses and develops according to new modernized and humanitarian ideals. He sees the southern individual as alienated and in despair without much of a chance to ever change this no matter what choices one makes in life. Faulkner sees southern identity as suffering under the legacy of racism, classism and sexism and the Otherness that arises from these legacies. He presents these discriminatory legacies as near impossible to exorcise, yet it is necessary to do exactly that. With this knowledge at hand, it comes as no surprise that Faulkner storytelling is rooted in tragedy and decline.

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